LILITH

THE INDEPENDENT JEWISH WOMEN'S MAGAZINE VOL. 18, NO. 3 $4.00

WHO ARE WE?

Twentysomething Jewish Feminists Swim in the Crosscurrents of Multiculturalism

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- **Discovering Powerful Female Voices —in Yiddish**
- **Remembering a Mother's Past**
- **Listening to Teens Talk About AIDS**

32
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The Jewish Women's Resource Center,
a project of the National Council of Jewish Women, New York Section,
is happy to announce another of its exciting conferences:

From Generation To Generation: A Celebration Of Jewish Feminism

December 5, 1993

The conference will cover a wide range of topics and feature many thought-provoking speakers, including Esther M. Broner and Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin who will be the keynote speakers and Dr. Sylvia B. Fishman who will summarize and close the event. Topics will include:

1. *Women as Caregivers: Feminist Dilemmas and Critical Choices*--Presenters: Dr. Rose Dobrof, Dr. Natalie Gordon, Elana Katz, M.S.W.
2. *Emerging Leaders: Listening to New Voices*--Presenters: Julie Blane, Jennifer Cowan
3. *Jewish Lesbian Lives: Spirituality, Family, Culture*--Presenters: Dorothy Barenholtz, Jyl Lynn Felman, Ileen Kaufman
4. *Issues of Feminism in Orthodoxy*--Presenters:Susan Aranoff, Blu Greenberg, Becky Herschfeld
5. *Religious Traditions / Feminist Transformations*--Presenters: Rivka Haut, Rabbi Linda Holtzman, Vanessa Ochs
6. *Sexuality: Traditional Values vs. Modern Practice*--Presenters: Judith Baskin, Ph.D., Judith Plaskow, Ph.D.
7. *Views from the Pulpit: Women as Spiritual Leaders*--Presenters: Cantor Nancy Abramson, Rabbi Melissa Crespy, Rabbi Sally Priesand
8. *Violence in Jewish Families: Understanding the Cycle*-- Presenters: Jewell Bellush, Ph.D., Lilian Green, Donna Laikind
9. *Jewish Feminist Visual Artists: Creating New Spiritual Perspectives*--Presenter: Diana Linden - Panel of Artists: ElaineAdler, Elizabeth Cohen, Beth Haber, Deborah Kruger, Rochelle Rubinstein, Renata Stein
10. *Mama-loshn: Women Reviving Yiddish Culture*--Presenters: Shulamith Berger, Irena Klepfisz

To register, please fill out the attached form and mail it with a check, made out to: NCJW, New York Section, to: NCJW, NY Section, 9 East 69th Street, New York, NY 10021, Attn.: Emily Milner, JWRC Coordinator. For more information please call: 212-535-5900

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LILITH

page 4

F E A T U R E S

page 8

8 Women Unbound
Challenging Jewish Divorce Law

by Naomi Grossman

Jewish law—which no longer permits animal sacrifices or slave-holding—still binds married women to husbands who refuse to grant them divorces. Now Jewish women's groups around the world, declaring this the Year of the Agunah, vow to overturn, overrule or overwrite the law's cruel inequity.

13 Riddles of Identity
Some Postgraduate Angst

Four very different Jewish women in their twenties try to figure out who they are, and how they fit into the multicultural mix.

14 Herefords, Hebrew and Me
by Karen Prager

18 White Jewish Female
What happens when I fit into more than one category?
by Hadar Dubowsky

20 I'm tired of checking off "other"
by Robin Beth Schaer

21 Mother Tongue, a short story
by Alina Sivorinovsky

page 14

24 On the Autopsy Table in Lodz
by Salomea Kape

A Brooklyn physician recalls with bitter irony her experiences as a medical student in a "normalized" Poland in the years immediately following the Holocaust.

32 Lunch With The Girls
The Ways We Are

by Leslie Hollis Margulies

...In which the author, mourning the gradual loss of her mother to Alzheimer's, discovers a generation of women who remember how to laugh.

page 32

D E P A R T M E N T S

2 FROM THE EDITOR

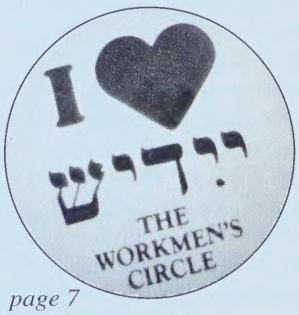
4 KOL ISHAH —
News of Jewish Women Around the World
The powerful new groundswell of interest in women who write in Yiddish; AIDS and teens; an "out" Jewish woman rock singer.

3 LETTERS

23 Join the Jewish Women's Talent Bank

27 LILITH Reviews
Feminist Biblical models, profiles of two funky Jewish women artists, and more.

30 TSENA RENA
LILITH's invaluable resource pages
Listings of where to go for everything you need if you're Jewish and female.



page 7

On the cover: from Multi-Cultural Celebrations: The Paintings of Betty La Duke, 1972-1992, *by Gloria Feman Orenstein, Pomegranate Artbooks, San Francisco, 1993.*

SUMMER 1993/ VOL. 18, NO. 3

LILITH is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam: ***"After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, the Holy One created a woman, also from the earth, and called her 'Lilith.' Lilith said: "We are equal because we both come from the earth . . .'"*** **(From** ***The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b*****)**

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FROM THE EDITOR

Featured on the cover of this issue is a set of stories written by Jewish women of the twentysomething generation, or that allegedly inscrutable "generation X." While these women (I can't say "young women," although I want to) are trying to place their own desires into the mosaic of the cultures around them, what I see as I look at them—three of the four have been working at LILITH during the past several months—I think not of *fitting in* but of *leaping away*, of flying off. The women who come to LILITH as interns and as editorial assistants move off into appropriate new realms—graduate school, permanent jobs, a year in Israel—to find themselves even as we (the grown-up staff) lose them. Or loose them.

I think a lot about what it means to "fledge" young adults, especially because two of my own children are now in their early twenties (and one of whom is beginning *her* year in Israel even as I write these lines). But the college students and recent graduates we see passing through the LILITH office aren't like one's own children at all. First of all, we work on specific tasks on a daily basis, so we often have the pleasure of seeing growth in a way that as a parent you only see in your kids when they are very small and their developmental milestones are dramatic. Like what? Like loosening up, for example. (Learning to fly, in other words.)

Especially for high-achieving women who have come of age in a time when they believe their futures are pretty much their own to shape, many of the twentysomething women we see are an odd amalgam of caution and adventure when they first cross LILITH's threshold. They are women of considerable achievement, both academically and personally, and they aren't, at first, comfortable with appearing inexpert, with being amateurs. At first, the kind of free-association brainstorming that shapes an article's approach, or the tone of a press release, or the title of a story, seems alien to people who are accustomed to knowing *the* right answer to an exam question. After a while—by which I mean a few sessions sitting around LILITH's crowded library table eating muffins and drinking bottled water—the interns and editorial assistants tell us at least a little of what they are thinking. They learn that it's safe to do so. They also learn how to set type on the computer, to "scan in" photographs, to interview other people about their lives, to be fearless on the phone.

They have shown the rest of us how boldly they can act, and with what enlightened self-interest, when it comes to the challenging work of renegotiating male-female relations, redirecting Jewish education for girls and women, rethinking LILITH's covers, and more. In a very satisfying way, while they learn, they teach.

If you know of women who should apply for LILITH internships in the future, please contact the LILITH office for details: INTERNS, LILITH, 250 West 57 St., Suite 2432, New York 10107. (212) 757-0818.

Susan Weidman Schneider

Susan Weidman Schneider and Rachel Schneider

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LETTERS

WOMEN PHILANTHROPISTS

he article on Jewish women's philanthropy ewish Women's Philanthropy," Winter 1993], ur analysis and evaluation of the potential of sh women in this area were most enlightening. t a pity that mainstream organizations are not e of this tremendous untapped reservoir of cial support.

commend you on the ten steps which you have ibed as directions for action for women to play e significant role in Jewish *tzedakah*.

—BEATRICE C. MAYER
Trustee,
Nathan Cummings Foundation
Chicago, IL

OLITICS OF BREASTFEEDING

the one hand, the cover of your Spring 1993 sue is the most transcendently beautiful ILITH cover ever. On the other hand, it raises ious question, one first raised by Gabrielle er in The Politics of Breastfeeding (Pandora,): why, in our culture, is it acceptable to show women breastfeeding, but not white women? n that only a tiny minority of Jewish women e from Ethiopia, why is LILITH's first ever e of a breastfeeding women that of a black an? The LILITH editorial staff should conduct ality check on itself for racism.

—CAROLE R. LIVINGSTON
Brooklyn, NY

INHERITING FUR COATS

hy are furs linked to Jewish women ["Inheriting Fur," Winter 1993]? Fur is worn by pious Jewish men as well. I posit a query llel to the one you raise about the young en given their beloved grandmothers' fur : do young men ever feel strange about inher- their grandfathers' fur hats? After all, wearing *eimel* [fur-rimmed hat worn by many hasidic in is not a *din* [law], but a *minhag* [custom] was adopted by some Jewish men in emula- of the Polish aristocracy in the eighteenth cen- A *streimel* is no more Jewish than any fash- r costume, and one day it may come to be ed as frivolous and sinful, a relic of an uncon- s era when animals were killed by the fur try—not even by a *shohet* [ritual slaughter- just to make the hats.

ndeed, the look of piety would be altered. Dare ok at the Jewish men who wear fur as well as wish women?

—HELENE AYLON
New York City, NY

Like Sara Nuss-Galles, I cannot divest myself of the memories of my mother in fur. My mother was a beautiful, glamorous woman who looked magnificent in fox and mink. I too was given a fur coat when I graduated from college. I owned many pairs of shoes in alligator and lizard skin and—shame to say—a pocketbook of elephant hide.

Many of us in the animal rights movement have similar tales to tell. We cannot change the past, but we can change the future. It hurts to give up beautiful things we love, but if we have moral stamina we can do it. A moral life requires choices, and in the choice between beauty and cruelty, or glamour and cruelty, or status and cruelty, the choice is morally obvious. Moreover, there is a beautiful array of faux fur and other materials just as glamorous and just as warm. Our children can have just as fond memories of us in other fabrics. It is only we, the generation in transition, who feel the disturbance in the shift from nostalgia to the higher moral ground.

One practical suggestion: Write for the Fur Amnesty brochure from In Defense of Animals (816 West Francisco Blvd., San Rafael, CA 94901, 415-453-9984) for information on how to make a tax deductible contribution of your fur coat.

—ROBERTA KALECHOFSKY,
President, Jews for Animal Rights
Marblehead, MA

NEW RITUALS

I was excited to read "A New Spin on an Old Tradition" [Spring 93], because I had reconstructed "Kabbalat Panim" for the wedding of my sister.

I learned that our Greek and Roman foremothers ritualized the transition from unmarried to married by using fragrant oil, torchlight, and amulets. Our Sephardic sisters prepared and protected their brides with henna and disguise. Eastern European Jewish women practiced a form of psychodrama, using song and dance to act out their feelings of sorrow at saying goodbye to a girlhood friend. Rabbis in the Talmud specify that "rejoicing the bride" is a *mitzvah* [obligation].

From my research, I developed a fourfold purpose for the ritual. It gives contemporary relevance to the passive "Kabbalat Panim," when the bride traditionally sits on one side of the room, waiting to be greeted. A sacred space is created for the transformation from bride-to-be to *kallah*. The relationships amongst women which existed prior to the bride and groom's are honored with a commitment to their endurance. Finally, the *kallah* is received, blessed and embraced as she emerges from this ritual for the chuppah.

The ritual's new name, "Kabbalat Kallah," a beautiful ritual reconstructed from many traditions, which places the responsibility on the community. To mark the transformation, we spoke newly-birthed blessings, shared memories and created amulets. The bride declared it the most honoring and moving experience of her life.

—SHARI S. GARFINKEL
Houston, TX

Ruth B. Goldston's adaptation of the Havdalah service to a divorce ["Separating," Spring 1993] illustrates the dangers of such borrowings. I am troubled by the imitation of an existing ceremony which is quite unrelated in spirit. I agree that Judaism needs ceremonies and liturgies to consacrate *our* daily lives, but, Havdalah is a celebration of the cyclical nature of our lives. Whatever divorce may be—and I am sure it is different for every divorced person—it is NOT a natural change. In fact, in speaking of the *decision* Naomi took to leave her husband, the article exposes its contrast to the inevitability of the changes Havdalah celebrates.

It seems to me that an adaptation of *Tefilat Ha'derech* (travel being a willed change), even an expansion of the Gomel blessings (divorce being an escape from a bad situation) coupled with a Psalm, such as 121, would be more in keeping with the spirit of divorce.

—C. PARENS
New York City, NY

JOIN THE LILITH JEWISH WOMEN'S TALENT BANK

PLEASE FILL OUT AND RETURN THE FORM ON PAGE 23

KOL ISHAH

WOMEN'S VOICES FROM ALL OVER

KOL ISHAH, Literally

Visiting San Deigo last summer, I did—subconsciously—what I always do in my travels. I searched for signs of *Yiddishkeit*. And I found an unexpected reward.

One sunny afternoon, driving south on El Camino Real in nearby Encinitas, I spotted a sign for Temple Solel. I pulled in.

Clearly, this was serendipitious! There in the parking lot stood a car with the license plate "KOLISHA," a phrase I knew from LILITH magazine as "Voice of Woman." I went inside and found out that the car belongs to Cantor Kathy Robbins, who welcomed me into the sanctuary. I mentioned the "Kol Isha" column in LILITH, and found out that Robbins was already a LILITH reader.

In addition to serving as cantor of the 500 family congregation, Robbins writes and performs Yiddish and liturgical music. Several years ago, on an airline trip to the east coast, a fellow passanger noticed that she was studying Hebrew music and engaged her in conversation. Robbins explained that she was preparing liturgical music for a cassette, "Singing Through The Jewish Seasons," which she was on her way to record in New York City. Impressed with he endeavors, the stranger responded, "You are *ko isha*."

Robbins was touched by their conversation, and b the time the plane landed, she had settled on KOL ISHA as the name of her new production company Robbins explains, "Shortly after I signed the paper for KOLISHA Productions, I had KOLISHA printed o my license plate. It's always a thrill when peopl know what it means."

—Sara Nuss-Galle

For more information about Kathy Robbins' mus or her latest cassette, "Yiddishe Meydele," conta Temple Solel, 552 South El Camino Real, Encinita CA 92024, (619)436-0654.

A HIP JEWISH ROLE MODEL

College women's music listening can usually be divided between the sweet Christian imagery of the Indigo Girls and the grunge noise of grrrl groups like Hole or L7. Now there's **Brenda Kahn**. "She is so funny—and she is Jewish," says Jennie Fennell, a college radio DJ at a small, conservative college in Virginia.

Starting off her major label debut, "Epiphany in Brooklyn," with the manic refrain "I don't sleep, I drink coffee instead," Kahn is an acoustic rocker with an overflowing love of language and a sardonic wit about romance between the sexes—"I left a stain on your glass/You called it a scar." She muses about the faults of intellectual men—"You find that your life is a frustrated vision/Of Gauguins, Rodins and excellent diction." Unlike other women singer/ songwriters influenced by both the Clash and Phil Ochs, her rockin' poems now admit to a lover that "there's a woman in your mouth who sighs your name" and that "I'd do anything to be in his arms again."

Brenda Kahn

Kahn's travels with her guitar are all grist for her lively verbal landscapes; now 26, since her teens she's peripatetically moved from her parents' home in New Jersey to Israel, Alaska, the London School of Economics and other places from where, she sings, "Brooklyn is a long cab ride away." Projecting a gutsy image to young women as she tours widely (including opening for Dylan in Europe), she first produced her own purple vinyl 45 rpm record in Minneapolis, then a demo that turned into a driving feminist college radio hit for a small label in Brooklyn, before recording for a SONY subsidiary in 1992.

Kahn recently sent her fan mailing list her ruminations on the linguistic power of anti-Semitism, likening it to "being on the playground as a child and someone says, 'he has cooties' and everyone makes a face because the person is endowed with a strange, unfortunate, albeit imaginary disease-like affliction." As she concertized at campuses this year with Dylan's Orthodox son-in-law Peter Himmelman, Kahn was unusually open for a rocker about being Jewish, providing a much needed hip role model of Jewish identity for college-age women.

—Nora L. Mandel

FEMINISM IN THE GENES

LILITH intern Robin Beth Schaer tells us... sold T-Shirts as my final political act on cam pus before graduating from Colgate Universit this past May. On the front the T-shirt sai "feminist" and on the back it read "feminism i the radical concept that women are human By graduation weekend I had sold 60 T-shirts with the final three going to my mother, aun and grandmother, who proceeded to wear thes T-shirts the entire weekend, letting everyon know whose family they were."

Sara Schaer

EWISH TEENS TALK ABOUT AIDS

IV/AIDS is a topic that many peo- avoided for years while it silently took its toll heir communities. The Jewish community is uilty of this as any other community, and there is much lost time to be made up. For S prevention and education to be effective, it t overcome ignorance, prejudice and denial.

The Center for Disease Control reports that f March 1993 there have been 182,275 rted deaths from AIDS, including over 0 children. These numbers are unrepresenta- of the actual danger we are in from this dis- . Dr. Robert Zielony, of the Jewish Board of ily and Children's Services, points out that ericans are fixated on the number of reported es of AIDS rather than on the widespread dence of HIV. He compares it to describing scenery by looking through a rear view mir- Today's reported cases reflect infections that have occurred years ago. He adds that er than asking how many Jews have the dis- , we need to ask how many Jews are putting nselves at risk.

The Jewish community is now trying to reach to its own members living with the disease and heir friends and families as well as to educate f about prevention. HIV/AIDS prevention is a to fulfill *Pikuach Nefesh*, the obligation to save e, a commandment which takes precedence over thers.

The JBFCS runs an HIV/AIDS Prevention Education Program. They believe that their entations and workshops for children, teens adults can manage HIV/AIDS awareness reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission. educational programs are often held at pub- and private schools, teens centers, PTA tings and synagogues. One of the most ortant services they provide is training peo- to educate others. This leaves a lasting ct on the community and empowers people educe the risk of HIV/AIDS through pre- tion and education.

Teenagers are often at high risk for AIDS demand an approach to prevention educa- that they can understand and relate to. One he most effective programs uses teen out- ch groups to educate their peers about /AIDS. The programs are directed by Dr. ony, who described being reminded of the ency to reach children after seeing his five old nephew pick up a hypodermic needle New York City park.

The program was started in September 1988 n funding from the State Department of lth and UJA/Federation, recently it has lost t of its major funding. Despite the setbacks, group has continued its work. With proper ding the group will be able to increase its staffing and reach many more people than it already does.

Dr. Zielony was linked through his work with the JBFCS to programs in the Jewish Community Center in Staten Island and the Riverdale YM-YWHA. The groups work in their own communities as well as in other parts of the city. The students are taught to be peer counselors through lectures, role plays, discussions and guest speakers. They present workshops, demonstrations and theatrical interpretations in schools and community centers. They educate their peers about high risk behavior, including unsafe sex and activities such as tattooing and ear piercing, and work to dispel myths about HIV/AIDS. They try to teach in a more engaging way than merely lecturing, with the belief that peers communicate and learn better with each other than from adults.

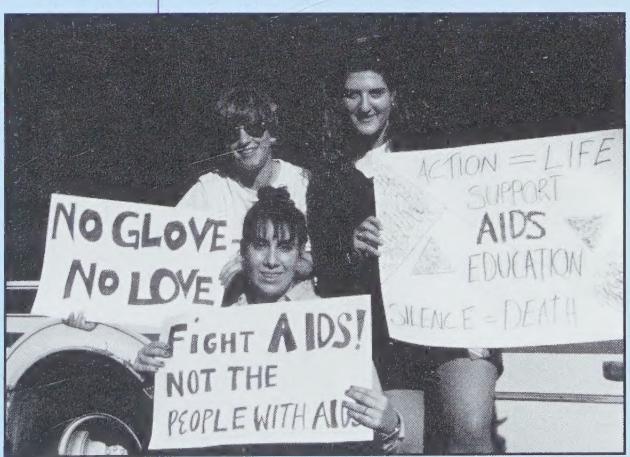
The group recruits students by making announcements in classrooms and community centers. It also sets up information tables and runs videos in school cafeterias. Many students got involved because they felt that the level of HIV/AIDS prevention and education provided by their school system is not sufficient. One of the peer educators, Ami Hoffman of Staten Island, complained that: "Only one week of one term throughout four years of high school is not enough HIV/AIDS education." In addition to complaining about the limited education provided by the schools, Ivana Schechter, a peer educator from Riverdale, said "there is a lack of communication about HIV/AIDS within the young adult population. Many of them have never spoken to anyone about the disease."

In recruiting and educating themselves and others, the teens have encountered many individual responses from their peers. Some, relying on the stereotypes of AIDS, believe that it is not their problem, and are driven by a sense of invulnerability. Others recognize the gravity of the situation through personal experience. Many of the students involved in the program believe that the most motivating experience was meeting someone living with HIV/AIDS.

The students involved in the program feel a great deal of support from their families and classmates. They remarked that only a few people were against the program. Their involvement is marked by an enthusiasm that goes beyond the education sessions. The students are proud that they are continually talking about prevention, spreading information and speaking with people who come to them for advice.

Involvement in peer education is often divided along gender and ethnic lines. Many more adolescent women are involved than adolescent men. Zielony says that it easier to recruit women for the peer education group "Because they don't anticipate the stigma of homophobia of visibly being involved with AIDS prevention." Another reason for this difference in participation, he notes, include the difference in adolescent gender maturity levels and the involvement in sports of many high functioning males. Ivana said that "It is O.K. for girls to be involved in HIV/AIDS education, but for men it is not macho, it is not a male thing to do."

Many of these young women are Jewish. There appears to be a strong motivation among adolescent Jewish women to work in HIV/AIDS education. Ami explained that "as Jews we are taught to help the sick without judgement and heal the world." In response to these commandments she says, "I hate seeing anyone suffer, so if I can help anyone I will." Ivana echoed this sentiment, explaining how being Jewish can be a motivation for HIV/AIDS education work; "the Jewish community has always been willing to help those less fortunate. As Jews, we tend to be conscientious, liberal and charitable." These young Jewish women have found that HIV/AIDS prevention and education is a way to fulfill the commandment to repair an imperfect world. "Everyone should realize they can defend themselves and prevent this disease," Ami said.



Working with the peer education has enabled the students to reach out to people different from themselves. Recently, a group of the peer educators went down to the Lower East Side of New York City to run a workshop. The educators were mostly Jewish girls; the students from the Lower East Side were mainly African-American and Latin-American. At first the Jews felt out of place and feared they would not be able to say effectively what needed to be said. Ivana was proud to report that, "We quickly transcended our differences and were able to communicate about a disease that threatens us all."

—Robin Beth Schaer

KOL ISHAH

WOMEN'S VOICES FROM ALL OVER

NORTHEASTERN EXPOSURE

What image comes to mind when you hear the words "rural New England?" "Bucolic farms," possibly? "Towering church steeples?" "Quaint Puritan villages?" How about, "one of the most vibrant, diverse, and committed Jewish communities in North America."

Surprised? Skeptical? So was I until I attended the Eleventh Annual Conference on Rural Judaism this past June at Lyndon State College in Lyndonville, Vermont. With nearly five hundred children, teens, and adults congregating from across New England, the conference provided a special opportunity for this unique Jewish population to create what Rabbi Daniel Siegel of Dartmouth College called a "magical community."

The magic resulted from the uninhibited nature of the weekend as a whole. Imagine women in Sephardic-style kippot and elegant *tallitot* leading a Jewish Renewal Shabbat service; lesbian partners holding hands at an outdoor Havdalah service; Julius Lester, an African-American Jewish convert, teaching about non-Orthodox forms of religiosity. Alike only in geographic distribution and in their strong commitment to Judaism, these participants demonstrated that it is possible to create a Jewish community without the binding force of proximity to other Jews.

Most striking in the wide range of activities and discussions which targeted this year's theme of "living with diversity" were the creative workshops dedicated to feminist and women's issues. Some of the more popular topics included: "Diversity of God Language: Different Ways of Naming and Understanding God" and "Rosh Chodesh: A Women's Celebration." These workshops demonstrate how rural New England now provides fertile soil for a feminist Jewish exploration.

The weekend enabled the attendees to build and expand already existing regional networks. Acknowledging that American Jewry is becoming increasingly spread out, Siegel stated that, "the smaller Jewish communities are not anachronisms. . . but rather glimpses into our Jewish future." The Conference on Rural Judaism serves as an excellent model for other small Jewish communities nationwide who want to connect with Jews in their region.

The Conference on Judaism in Rural New England was founded in 1983 by a circle of friends from Montpelier, Vermont, and Hanover, New Hampshire. For more information write to: Conference on Judaism, P.O. Box 68, Burlington, VT, 05402, or call 802-864-4192.

—Janine Zacharia

AN ALTERNATIVE TO SEXIST JEWISH CHILDREN'S BOOKS

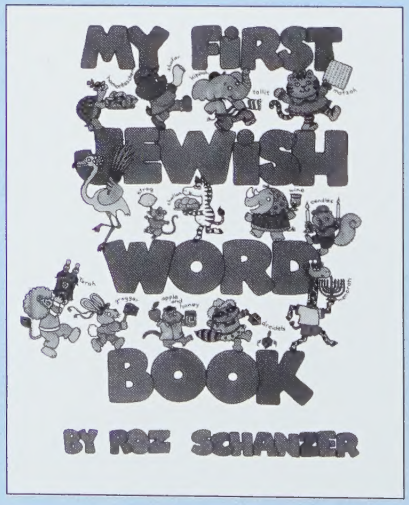
In these children's books, Mommy is a Rabbi, a deer in a dress carries a Torah scroll, and Grandpa makes the soup for Shabbat dinner. Kar-Ben Copies, the internationally known Jewish children's publishing company, sells 200,000 books a year and carries 90 titles geared for preschool and primary school children. The books are bright, colorful and innovative—and best of all—they are both Jewish and egalitarian.

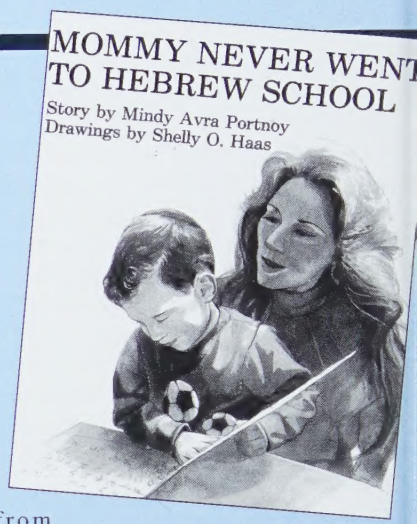
This unique publishing company was founded by Madeline Winkler and Judye Groner, whose collaboration began with a Passover celebration together in 1974. Groner, who has a strong Jewish background, was put in charge of finding a Haggadah which would appeal to their young children. After searching through dozens and finding-nothing, she wrote her own.

My Very Own Haggadah, a story of a young girl's first seder, was a huge success at the Passover celebration. Friends and relatives encouraged Groner and Winkler to get the book published, but "every publisher we approached turned us down, claiming there was no market for Jewish children's books," recalls Winkler.

Undaunted, the two women pooled their resources and printed 5,000 copies in time for the following Passover, peddling it to friends, relatives, synagogues and schools. Sales got a big boost when a local supermarket agreed to stock it among their Passover items. The Haggadah has since sold over a million copies!

Kar-Ben's books educate by integrating Jewish themes into the universal dilemmas with which children must cope. *Grandma's Soup* deals with a grandmother suffering





from Alzheimer's, who one week puts cloves in her soup and the next doesn't r ognize her grandchildren. *A Turn for N* takes place during Chanukah and focuses a child's anxiety about not being able to s the dreidle properly. *Daddy's Chair* ta place during the week of shivah in whic family with young children mourns the de of their father.

Early on, Kar-Ben became a magnet writing on themes that might not ha found a place with either Jewish or gen publishers. For example, Kar-Ben publis two books by Rabbi Mindy Portnoy: *Ima the Bima*, about a child whose mother i rabbi, and *My Mother Never Went Hebrew School*, a story about a boy wh mother, a convert to Judaism, ha Christian childhood.

"The Jewish community is diverse, not everyone can be satisfied with ev depiction," says Winkler. "We show g wearing pants, which sometimes angers s ments of the Orthodox, and our boys w yarmulkes, which sometimes makes sc Reform Jews unhappy."

Some Kar-Ben books contain an introd tion and glossary of words. "We also rode wave of multiculturalism," says Gron "which has created a demand for religi and ethnic books in the schools."

"Other publishers didn't take into acc a new market for Jewish children's boo created by a generation of parents in the who might not have had a Jewish educat but who were looking for simple, conc ways to begin to express their Judaism to instill Jewish values in their childre says Groner. "Readable Jewish books how to celebrate the holidays and ot Jewish themes fit the bill."

—Helen Belis

COMING SOON TO A *LEYENKRAYZ* NEAR YOU...

Powerful Women's Writing In Yiddish

If it's Tuesday, it must be Yiddish. In years past I would spend almost every Tuesday night enjoying a bargain movie but it has been over a year since I have abandoned the cinema for a little "Yiddish by the *tish* [table]."

The place I call home for Yiddish study and spirituality is a unique women's study group in Toronto in which we read and discuss the writings of Yiddish women writers. The group's *khaverkes* [sisters] are fourteen women who range in age from our 20's to our 70's. We are writers, editors, teachers, librarians, researchers, artists, social workers, *bubbes* and new mothers, all from a variety of backgrounds and levels of Yiddish fluency. We read the texts in Yiddish and discuss them in English.

Thanks to the efforts of our resourceful members who find and research the writers and their material, we have read the poetry and prose of such obscure and lesser-known writers as Dora Shulner, Sarah Hammer Jacklyn, Yenta Serdatsky and Rokhl Broches, as well as better known writers like Malka Lee and Kadya Molodovsky. Their stories, poems and autobiographies span ideologies, dialects, generations, continents, and time frames, reaching from the towns of Eastern Europe in the 1800's to immigrant districts of Montreal in this century to modern Israel.

In these study sessions, we uncover the richness and vastness of Yiddish women's writing. In books and anthologies of Yiddish literature, women's writing is greatly underrepresented, and only in this group have I had a chance to learn of the monumental contributions of Jewish women to Yiddish literature.

To give the voices and fine literary efforts of Yiddish women's writings a much deserved place in the canon of modern Yiddish literature, three members of the group are co-editing a new anthology of these women's writings, translated into English with the participation of other women in the group. We are amazed to find that there are literally hundreds of women writers, novelists, dramatists, and journalists who have not been read for decades, just waiting to be found, read and translated.

—Ellen Tulchinsky

Starting a *Leyenkrayz far Froyen-literatur* [reading circle for women's Yiddish literature] may be easier than you think. You can reach potential members through existing Yiddish groups, Jewish seniors organizations or university Yiddish programs. When we first set out to establish a study group in Toronto, we were greeted with the predictable, "*Only* women writers—how narrow!" and "Are there really any *great* Yiddish women writers?" Fortunately for us and for Yiddish scholarship, we were not in the least deterred. A year later we have a thriving, lively group of fourteen which brings us *fargenign* [pleasure] we hardly could have anticipated. To join our group or to get help in forming your own, contact:

❍ Bletl: Newsletter of the Yiddish Women's Literature Network

When you return your subscription fee, please indicate whether we may publish your name, address and special area of interest in the next issue. Subscriptions: $10/year or $5/year for those on limited income. Make checks out to: The Network for Yiddish Women's Literature and send to: Freida Forman, Centre for Women's Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto Ontario, Canada M5S1V6 FAX: (416)926-4725.

❍ Free Subject List

for Yiddish Women Writers—a print-out of 375 book titles by and about Yiddish women writers can be ordered from the National Yiddish Book Center, P.O. Box 969, Old East Street School, Amherst, MA 01004. FAX: (413) 253-4261.

❍ YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

Offers comprehensive coverage of Yiddish writings in its library and archives and offers all levels of Yiddish classes. 1048 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10028, (212)535-6700.

❍ The Workmen's Circle

Offers lectures and seminars on Yiddish literature—including Yiddish women writers, carries works by Yiddish women writers in its bookstore, and runs "Kinder Ring," a Yiddish culture camp offering programs for both children and adults. 45 E. 33rd Street, New York, NY 10016, (212)889-6800 or outside NY 800-922-2558.

❍ Sterling Memorial Library Yale University

Carries an extensive collection of Yiddish literature available directly or through interlibrary loan. New Haven, CT 06520, (203) 432-1775.

❍ Yiddish of Greater Washington

An umbrella organization for activities and organizations, including Yiddish reading groups and Yiddish cultural festivals. YGW coordinated the first international Yiddish Clubs Conference and is planning the 1995 conferance in Toronto, Canada. 6125 Montrose Road Rockville, MD 20854, (301) 656-5951.

❍ The Yiddish Network

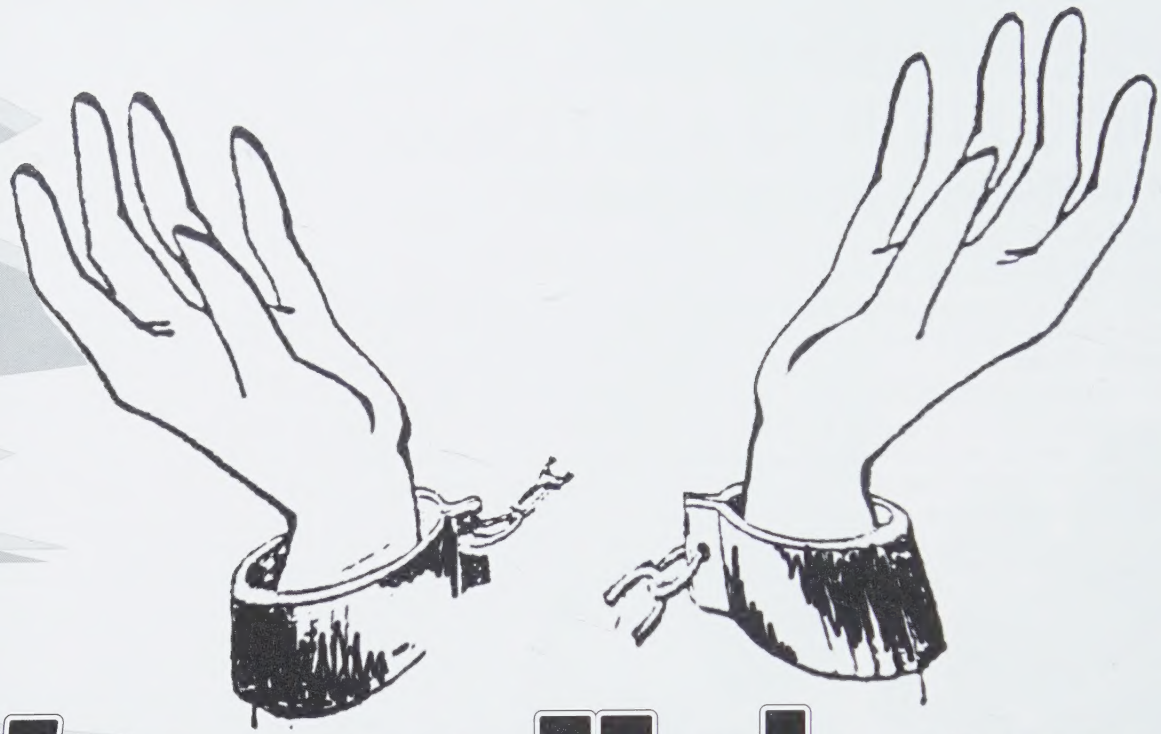
Resource for international contacts and information on Yiddish clubs, people, organizations and culture. Publishes newsletter: "Der Bay." Fishl Kutner, 1128 Tanglewood Way, San Mateo, CA 94403, (415) 349-6946. Internet E-Mail: FISHL@WELL.SF.CA.US

❍ Circle of Yiddish Clubs

Contact for over 140 Yiddish organizations in the Florida area and 35 clubs outside of Florida. Soref Jewish Community Center, 6501 W. Sunrise Blvd, Sunrise, FL 33313, Attn: Sunny Landsman.

❍ On-Line InterNet Yiddish Network

called "Mendele"
To subscribe:
{LISTSERV@YALEVM.YCC.YALE.EDU}
At message prompt:
{SUB MENDELE first name last name.}



Women Unbound

Breaking the Chains of Jewish Divorce Law

by Naomi Grossman

Thousands of Jewish women in failed marriages remain in a state of legal bondage to husbands—even estranged husbands—who refuse to grant them a Jewish divorce, without which they cannot remarry.

Women in Chains

One, night, Rachel's husband locked her in the bedroom of their Tel-Aviv apartment, forced their three young children into the kitchen, turned on the gas, and locked the door. He told Rachel he would kill the children if she didn't give him money to buy drugs. Since her husband had already taken all the money she had, Rachel could do nothing but scream as she heard her children coughing and choking. Fortunately, the neighbors heard her and called the police. Her husband was jailed for nine months, after which he was back, doing drugs and beating her and the kids. After he broke her nose for the second time, Rachel took her children and fled to the battered women's shelter in Herzliya. She filed for divorce.

That, she says, is when her ordeal started.

"Every time we went to the rabbinical court, my husband, who was high most of the time, would say the magic words: that he wanted '*shalom bayit* [peace in the home].' I told them all I wanted was a divorce, but they never listened to me. Over the course of six years they told me thirty different times that we should try to make peace."

In Israel, where civil marriages and divorces don't exist, a divorce decree—a *get*—can be issued only through the rabbinical courts. Further, only a man may instigate a *get*. In order for a *get* to be valid, three factors are required: the approval of the rabbinical court, the husband's willingness to give the *get* and the wife's willingness to accept the *get*. If the couple both agree to the divorce, the *get* can be issued very quickly.

Problems arise, however, when one spouse refuses either to give or to accept the *get*. In such cases, the rabbinical court, recognizing the need for divorce, may compel whichever spouse is recalcitrant to give or accept the divorce (with a threat of a jail sentence). However, the court almost never utilizes this capability. While

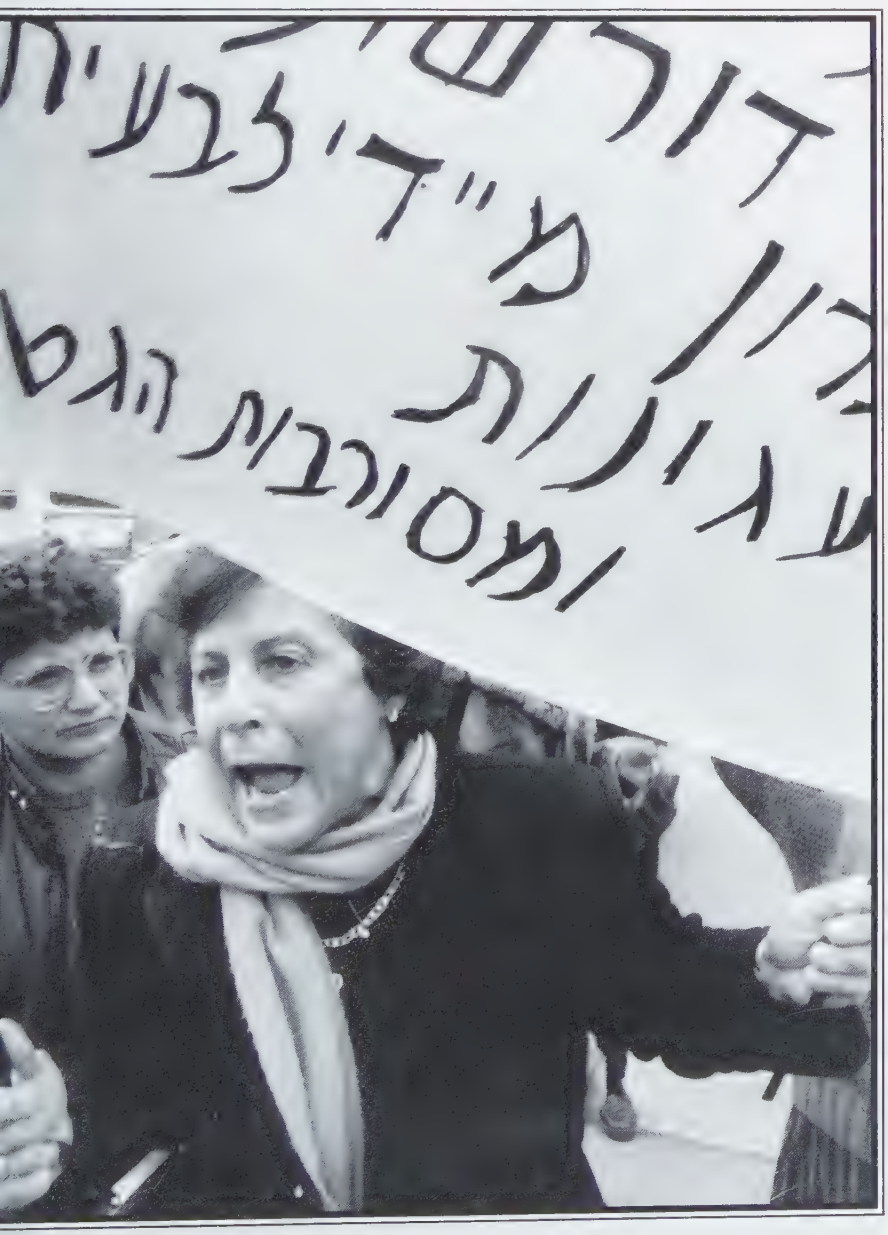
Art taken from an Israeli poster protesting inequities in Jewish divorce law.

there have been rare instances where a woman held up a divorce by refusing to accept the *get*, the overwhelming majority of cases involve a husband who won't give his wife a *get*. Even worse, there is a provision for the husband's release (called *heter mea rabbanim*) if his wife refuses to accept the *get*, *while there is no such provision for a woman.*

Last January, Rachel again appeared in rabbinical court to plead for the recommendation of a divorce from her husband. Her lawyer, Sharon Shenhav, from the legal division of Na'Amat—Working Women and Volunteers, a women's organization in Israel, was not present, because Rachel knew the rabbis felt Shenhav was pressuring her into a divorce that she didn't really want. Both Shenhav and Rachel agreed that Rachel should try to convince them on her own that divorce was what she wanted.

"We entered the room. The rabbis asked my husband what *he* wanted. He said he wanted '*shalom bayit*.' I said *I* wanted a divorce. My husband picked up one of the chairs in the room and threw it at me, breaking my nose and cheekbone." Though the rabbinical court maintains that they called the police for her and brought her to the hospital, Rachel insists that after the attack she was told to go outside to the street to telephone the police. Either way, the police came and put Rachel's husband in jail for six months. It was clear that reconciliation between the couple was impossible.

Yet the rabbinical court still would not use compulsory divorce measures. The court recommended divorce, but said that the couple should work out the actual agreement themselves. Luckily for Rachel, her husband was in jail for beating her and wanted to be released. Sharon Shenhav promised him a recommendation for a shortened sentence, plus a recommendation that his debt to National Insurance would be erased. (Under the family maintenance act of 1972, if a father does not provide maintenance for his children, the latter can collect from National Insurance, and N.I. itself will retrieve the money from the father.) For some reason, however, the rabbis felt that Rachel's husband did not understand the divorce agreement; they wanted to wait another two weeks. Shenhav insisted that the divorce be signed at that moment, and the rabbis eventually agreed. After six years of waiting, Rachel was finally freed.



What is the problem?

Believe it or not, Rachel's scenario is a good one. Between 8,000 and 10,000 women in Israel today are being denied a divorce, according to Leslie Sachs, spokeswoman for the Israel Women's Network. The rabbinical court does not keep figures, but Rabbi Eli Ben-Dahan, general director of the rabbinical courts of Israel, estimates that there are only 1,000 women nationwide awaiting divorce.

These women remain "unreleased" because they don't want to give up their children's maintenance money, or their children, or their houses, or because their husbands just don't want to let them go. In fact, Rachel would probably be considered lucky by the many women who have been waiting fourteen, sixteen, even eighteen years for their husbands to give them a *get*. These "*agunot*" (literally, "chained" women) are trapped. There are many who contend that this is not what Jewish law intended, and these people are beginning to work to remedy the situation.

Halakhically [according to Jewish law], forcing a husband to give his wife a *get* is no simple matter. Rabbi Eli Ben-Dahan explains the concern that if compulsory *get* measures are used incorrectly, the *get* becomes invalid. From the founding of the State in 1948 until 1986 there were only fourteen cases in which the rabbinical court used compulsory *get* measures on a recalcitrant husband. Rabbi Ben-Dahan points out that in the past year alone, rabbinical courts used compulsory *get* measures on at least five recalcitrant hus-

bands. Still, most women's groups feel that this is not nearly enough.

While the problem of equitable divorce exists worldwide, it is most acutely felt in Israel, where there is no such thing as a civil divorce. All matters of "personal status"—such as marriage and divorce—are under the jurisdiction of religious courts, as in a classic theocracy. Muslims must abide by Islamic law, Christians by their law, and Jews—even non-religious Jews—by Jewish law. Whether or not they are observant, Jewish women need a *get* if they want to remarry in Israel. Also, *halakhically*, if a non-divorced woman has a child with another man, that child is considered a "*mamzer*," a stigma that remains forever. The Orthodox rabbinate will only marry a *mamzer* to another *mamzer*. Worse still, a man may have children with another woman, and even get permission from the Rabbinical court to take a second wife. In fact, between 1980-1985 the Rabbinical courts in Israel gave 95 men permission to take second wives.

"Most of these women care if their children are "*mamzers*,'" explains Sachs. "So, for a young woman with no children the crime is doubled—she can't remarry *or* have children. It is a tool for blackmail and it works. These women give up everything—alimony, child support, their houses, their cars—just for the *get*. They end up condemned to a life of poverty."

"It is an embarrassment that a woman today has literally to pay for her divorce," says Daniella Valensi, head of Israel's Organization to Help Agunot and Those Denied Divorce. Valensi was married for a year and a half when she asked her husband for a *get*. He refused her for twelve years, until the rabbinical court finally enforced compulsory *get* measures. "Why didn't they do it ten years before? Twelve years of my life are gone. I can't build a family, I can't have more children, and everyday I see hundreds of women going through the same thing." Valensi claims that in many cases it is the rabbinical judges who suggest to the husbands that they should be "asking for something" when they finally agree to succumb to the pressure to give the *get*.

"He is in a position to blackmail her, and if she doesn't agree, he goes on with his life," says Shenhav. "When a woman has to give up her rights to property or child support to get her *get*, I call that blackmail."

As Shenhav points out, rabbis have been dealing with recalcitrant husbands for centuries. Shenhav blames the rabbinical courts today, saying that they have the power to control the problem but that they refuse to use it. She cites the law that if a husband and wife are separated for eighteen months, and he still refuses to grant her the *get*, the court can enforce a compulsory *get*.

"Five cases of compulsory *get* in the past year is just not enough. The problem is so much bigger than that. Why is it that in the *haredi* [ultra-orthodox] communities you don't have this problem? It's because in Mea Shearim [*haredi* neighborhood in Jerusalem] there's a hit team and they are very organized. If a husband refuses to give his wife a *get*, they will pay him a visit on Saturday night after *shabbat* and 'convince' him to give the *get*, and he always does."

In her ten years of practicing divorce law in Israel, Shenhav says she received one ruling of compulsory *get*. The case involved a man who was in jail for murder but refused to grant his wife a *get*. Because the man was already in jail, Shenhav succeeded in convincing the courts that he should be sent to solitary confinement as a measure of coercion. Right before he was to be sent, the man signed the *get*. The verdict received headlines because it was so rare.

The Year of the Agunah

The International Year of the Agunah opened internationally this past March with the formation of ICAR—the International Coalition for Agunah Rights—which includes women's groups from Canada, England, the United States, and Israel. In Israel, the Year got underway with a demonstration outside Heichal Shlomo, the Jerusalem headquarters of the Chief Rabbinate, during the election of the new chief rabbis. This was immediately followed by a presentation of the issue at the Knesset, sponsored by the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women, and media coverage of the plight of *agunot* has picked up considerably this past year. The Israel Women's Network is working on new proposals for legislative change which were recommended to the Knesset in July. (These include the pending original proposal for sanctions on a recalcitrant husband.) Other efforts around the globe:

North America: New York State and Canada have passed legislation prohibiting civil divorce until the religious divorce has been signed. Canada's National Council of Jewish Women has passed a resolution expressing total committment to the Year of the Agunah. A committee has been established in New York to investigate the *halakhic* approach to the problem.

Australia: A National Council of Jewish Women has been established, as has a task force on the issue of *agunot*.

England: A Jewish Women's Network has been launched, committing itself to working on the issue of agunot by publicizing the problem. The Network is also part of a commission examining women's Jewry for the Committee on Women and Divorce, due to submit its report in September.

Europe: There was an initial response from some women's groups in France, but unfortunately the rest of Europe has remained silent.

—*N.G.*

What to Do:

During *Aseret Y'may T'shuvah,* the ten days of repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, watch for increased pressure from the International Coalition of Jewish Women for the Get. Serious measures, including a large poster campaign, will be aimed towards educating agunot about their options and rallying Jewish women behind the cause.

The next General Assembly of North American Federations to be held in Montreal, Canada in November 1993, should serve as an ideal location to discuss the crisis of the agunah. Montreal is where the steering committee of the International Coaltion of Jewish Women for the Get, the first organized effort to educate the public about Get and advocate protective civil legislation, is located.

Photos By: Debbi Cooper

Why are the rabbis doing so little?

Alice Shalvi, chair of the Israel Women's Network, feels that part of the problem is that being a rabbinical judge is no longer considered a prestigious position in the yeshiva circles, so it is not necessarily the wisest or most learned men (always men) who end up as judges in the rabbinical courts. Also, many of them were brought up in environments where they had almost no contact with women, which makes it difficult for them to be sensitive to the plight of the women whose cases they see, and which makes women uncomfortable telling their stories to these men.

Moreover, a full workday for a rabbinical judge is nine to twelve-thirty, and many come in late or not at all, leaving very little time to deal with the large number of cases. Many lawyers complain that they must wait hour after hour for hearings which are endlessly postponed. Cases drag on, lawyers' fees get higher and higher, and women get worn down and end up giving up and giving in.

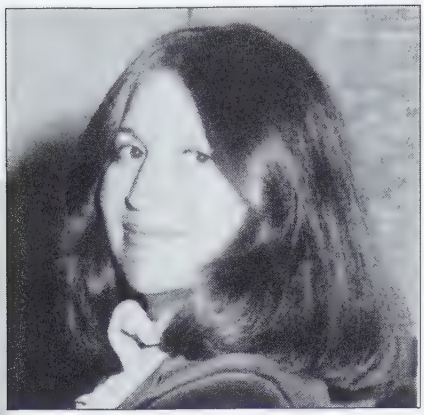
Of course, there are some hard-working, learned, and sensitive rabbinical judges. Many women who go through the system cite examples of individual rabbis who try to talk to their husbands or who give them support.

Rachel Jahassi was married for less than a year when, at the age of 22, she filed for divorce. It took seven years for her husband to agree to give her a *get*, and that was only after she promised to pay him 30,000 Israeli shekels (about $12,000). During those years she completed a Master's degree in Talmud, and wrote a thesis on compulsory *get* measures; today she is studying to be an arbitrator in the rabbinical courts. Rachel is certain that according to *halakha*, compulsory *get* measures could have been taken in her case, but that the rabbis weren't taking her seriously. She is thrilled to be free—but at what price? She has no money left, and her twenties are gone forever. "It is clear," she says, "that not enough is being done."

Will changes in civil law help at all?

Many of those involved in the issue point hopefully to the new legislation being considered in the Knesset. Two years ago, twelve proposals suggested by different interest groups were presented to the Lobby to Help Women Being Denied Divorce. The proposals involved sanctions put on a husband who will not give his wife a *get*, such as taking away his driver's license, passport, and visa, limiting his use of checks and credit cards, and not allowing him to vote.

"Why do they need new legislation?" asks Shenhav. "Taking away their license? Come *on*. I'm dealing with drug addicts, unemployed men, alcoholics. They care if they can be



Sharon Shenhav, Legal Aid Director, Na'mat, Jerusalem.

elected to Knesset or not? Or if they can vote? Most of them don't have cars, and they couldn't care less if you took away their passports. There is only one thing that will affect them, and that is going to jail. This new law might help some people, but why, I ask, don't they use what they've already got? They simply have to use their tools."

Shenhav believes the only way this will happen is through civil pressure. "The rabbis are not being pressured enough. The only way that things will change is if the civil courts get into the picture. If we had a bill of rights that gave a woman the constitutional right to marry, then, if her husband refuses to give her a *get*, we can say that she is being denied her constitutional right to marry, and then she would be permitted to remarry. Then maybe if the rabbis knew she could remarry they might do something about it."

Nevertheless, there are still thousands of women in Israel today who are waiting for their husbands to free them by signing a *get*. There is an urgency to this issue now. This is not something that happens to someone else, and it is not confined to any one sector of the population. Educated as well as uneducated women suffer. It can happen to a rich woman as well as a poor one. Every Jewish woman is vulnerable.

Says Sacks, "you start to have arguments, maybe your husband becomes disturbed, loses his balance. You want to get out of the marriage, but he won't let you. And then, like all these women, you're trapped. Only then can you really understand what a serious issue this is. None of these women thought it could happen to them." ■

Naomi Grossman lives in Jerusalem and has written for The Jerusalem Post, Israel Scene, Publishers' Weekly, *the Jewish Agency, and the Global Press Service.*

Steps in the right direction

One model for interim measures which can be taken to ameliorate, if not to solve, the problem of agunot, comes from Kehilath Jeshurun, an Orthodox congregation in New York, whose approach is being considered by other Orthodox synogogues as well. Last spring, the congregation passed a resolution to put public pressure on a man who refuses to give his wife a *get* even after a council of three Orthodox rabbis has decided that he is obligated to do so. The synagogue will impose the following sanctions on a recalcitrant husband:

1. He may not be a member of the synagogue.
2. He may not hold a position in any synagogue organization.
3. He may not be called to the Torah or given any liturgical honors.
4. His name will be announced at the conclusion of Shabbat services no less than once a month.
5. His name will be published in the synagogue bulletin with a request that members limit their social and economic relations with this man.

Perhaps this is a model for other synagogues and Jewish organizations to consider; however, the effectiveness of such sanctions (like the laws proposed in Israel to take away the passport or driver's license of a man who withholds a get) is dependent upon the extent to which the husband is bound by the mores of the community. What if he doesn't care? What if he says, "So I'll stop going to shul. So, I'll find new friends. So, sue me."

More radical proposals to right the inequity of this male supremacist law were proposed at a World Union of Jewish Students seminar on feminism and Judaism held in Jerusalem last summer. Suggestions included: calling a hunger strike of all *agunot*; setting up a cage, in the public sphere, in which *agunot* would lock themselves to demonstrate their desparate situation; maintaining intense press coverage of the issue; and boycotting organizations which uphold the *agunot* principle while supporting those which use *halakha* to achieve a just solution to the problem.

To lend your support on the Agunah issue, or to receive help if you yourself are being held hostage in a failed marriage, contact:

International Coalition for
Aguna Rights (ICAR)
1175 York Avenue
New York, NY 10021
212-759-6501

Agunah
463 East 19 Street
Brooklyn, NY 11226
718-253-8855

G.E.T. (Getting Equitable
Treatment)
P.O.B. 300131
Brooklyn, NY 11230
718-435-1310

Kayama
1202 Avenue J
Brooklyn, NY 11230
718-692-1876

Coaltion of Jewish Women
for the GET
7 Irving Place
Dollard des Ormeaux
Quebec H9A 1Y4
Canada
514-342-5931

Organization to Help Agunot
and Those Denied Divorce
P.O.B. 3095
Tel Aviv, Israel 61316
03-391-164

Israel Women's Network
7 Gihon Street
Jerusalem, Israel 93547
02-713-033

To receive a copy of the May 1993 publication: *Facts about Jewish Divorce*, send a self addressed stamped envelope with a letter of request to: B'nai Brith Women of Canada, 638A Sheppard Avenue West, Downsview, Ontario, M3H2S1.

RIDDLES OF IDENTITY

POSTGRADUATE ANGST

What makes Jewish women in their twenties worried, angry or hopeful? What are their concerns once they have moved away from the campus scene in their immediate postgraduate years? Since LILITH's founding in 1976, the magazine has attracted college students and recent graduates to work as interns, giving the senior staff an inside track on their concerns.

These concerns have changed, and in the following pages you'll hear the fresh voices of a new generation of women who have distinctive perspectives on multiculturalism, the rubric for a whole set of issues which bring to the fore urgent questions about identity, especially for Jewish women.

When LILITH introduced its "On and Off Campus" columns in 1990, the topics of concern for its college-age authors (some of whom were LILITH interns) included, among others, date rape, sexual harassment, a take-back-the-night march at Princeton, the formation of a Rosh Chodesh group among Jewish women studying at the University of Santiago in Chile. The problems women dealt with on campus had to do with sex, sexism, the stereotyping of Jewish women by Jewish men (and others). For the most part, Jewish women activists reported exhilaration a sense of shared endeavour with their non-Jewish cohorts.

Something feels different now, in the wake of the intense self-scrutiny multiculturalism has engendered. The questions Jewish women are asking today—along with "How can I make the world a better place?" and "How can I integrate feminism into my Jewish practice?" and, "Why don't I find Jewish partners?"—have to do with fitting into a larger national mosaic—"Is there a boundary between my Jewish identity and my other concerns?" "How can I be a citizen of my land?" and so forth. Ironically, these are the same kinds of questions, minus this generation's commitment to pluralism and diversity, that Jewish *men* asked themselves two generations ago as they tried to integrate into North American life. Caught in the often compex crosscurrents of identity streams, the questions young Jewish women are asking today have as much to do with being "out" as Jews as they do with political or sexual preferences. In the multicultural mix, Jewish women—especially those in their immediate post-college years—are struggling to define themselves as Jews. Committed to the egalitarian goals of feminism, they want to feel as comfortable combatting overt or subtle anti-Semitism as they have been in speaking out for women's rights, cultural diversity, racial equality, and other social justice issues.

In the next several issues, LILITH will continue to present the voices of an emerging generation of Jewish feminist women. Here, four women, all in their twenties, explore in very different ways how to be Jewish and female in the 90's.

•Karen Prager describes giving an impromptu lecture on elementary Zionism to neophyte cowgirls who'd never before seen a Jew.

•Hadar Dubowsky finds that her definition of who she *really* is changes hourly at a social-change conference. Is she a karate-trained feminist strongwoman in her Wild Woman persona? A Jewish social-justice advocate? What comes first?

• Robin Beth Schaer, a part-Sephardic woman, tells how her "Middle Eastern" coloring gets her identified only by her dark skin tones, not by her Jewishness.

•Alina Sivorinovsky, an emigre from the former Soviet Union, gives us, in a short story, the voice of a 17-year-old babysitter encountering American parents' rigid expectations for their young.

Welcome to the world of postgraduate angst.

Herefords, Hebrew & Me

At the Feminist Ranch

by Karen Prager

As soon as I boarded the Dallas-bound plane in Newark I felt like the only Jew for miles around. A man wearing a ten-gallon hat sat in the row across from me, and for a split second I felt relieved that I was able to pass. By the time I made it to Wichita, two flights later, I felt like the only Jew in the universe. Toto, we're not in New York anymore. What was a nice Jewish girl from the suburbs of New York doing on the Kansas prairie? Oddly enough, the story starts in a Rosh Chodesh group in Jerusalem . . . .

Gathered with a group of women friends in a spacious old apartment in the Holy City, I spotted an old issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. The cover painting depicted a huge expanse of prairie, a tiny house, and a mammoth bolt of lightening. Living in Israel, starved for all things American, I took the magazine back to my place. I inhaled the story, an excerpt from William Least Heat-Moon's book *PrairyErth*—a huge tome on Chase County, Kansas (pop. 3000), home of the Flint Hills, the only remaining tall-grass prairie in the world. Obsessed with the story in the *Atlantic*, I took to reciting bits aloud to my roommate and to reading some parts three, four or five times.

The article told tales of Osage and Kiowa Indians, first-person remembrances of being sucked skyward by tornados ("we knew it was bad when we saw the stove fly by"), and tips on living in a flood plain ("we decorated keeping in mind things would get wet"). But what really grabbed me, curled on my second-hand futon overlooking HaPalmach street, was Heat-Moon's report of the Homestead Ranch, an all-woman cattle operation. Reading the description of the yearly castration process ("'welcome to steerdom,' someone calls out in falsetto"), I laughed at the image of ranch owner Jane Koger riding in her Jeep with a jar full testicles ("cowfries") clamped between her legs. I *had* to get to this ranch.

Why? my roomate wondered. Why, indeed?

One answer goes back to the first two years of my life, spent on an Indian Reservation in South Dakota while my father worked as a doctor with the Indian Health Service. "Hereford" and "Charolais" (cattle breeds) were among my first words, my parents tell me and as a toddler my favorite activity was going "south o'town" to watch the cattle graze. By the time we moved back east, they boast, I could identify every breed pictured in the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica.*

Apparently, my bovophilia had lain just below the surface for some twenty years—one moment of Proustian connection via the *Atlantic* and the cows—well—came home. Besides, what feminist would not be fascinated by the idea of a working cattle ranch on the prairie, run by women, accepting only women as guests?

Several months later, back in the U.S. and working at LILITH, I was able to realize my fantasy. I joined in at one of Jane's "Prairie Women Adventures and Retreat" weekends, when she opens the ranch to aspiring cowgirls like myself.

On the one-and-a-half-hour drive from the Wichita airport to Matfield Green (no post office, no school, just a church and a beer joint), I spotted a huge billboard which said "shleppers." See, I thought, things aren't so different out here—

Kansans use the word "shlep" too. Well. . . not exactly. Blinking, I realized that the sign advertised "Shepler's." No Yiddish in sight.

The foreign landscape got me thinking, and as I watched the prairie and spindly cottonwoods roll by, I felt keenly aware that it was *tzom Gedaliah*, the fast of Gedaliah, the day after *Rosh Hashanah*. My twelve years of Orthodox schooling, brushed aside during four years at Harvard, hit me full force. I didn't feel any more at ease when, in response to my observation, "I guess there aren't many Jews around here," Jane smiled and said "There aren't *any* Jews around here. You're it for miles and miles."

Oh.

So this was the reality. In Israel I had yearned for real Americana; now I had it and I wanted someone who spoke Hebrew, or at least a few words of Yiddish. I had wanted the country—yet here I was in a world where gravel roads felt like superhighways, where every star shone on moonless nights, and the beauty failed to compensate for my pervasive sense of being a stranger in a strange land.

By Friday afternoon, some fifteen sister pioneers had arrived, many leaving husbands and children, though I was the only one who had crossed the Mississippi to get there. Mary Agnes and Therese came together from Missouri ("Indipindince," to be exact), and Kate and Diana just came down the road aways from Kansas State U. Rheta had flown in from Colorado to learn about ranching—she was thinking of raising horses back home—and Virginia, our sixtysomething senior member and a native Kansan, was by far the toughest of us all, though she refused to gather eggs, having encountered too many snakes in her grandma's henhouse as a child. Kay came from Corpus Christi, Texas ("Corpus" to Lonestar State natives), leaving her husband with their infant and toddler for the first time. Unfortunately, my bunkmates had gleaned most of their knowledge of Judaism from Saturday Night Live and sitcoms, and it was infuriating to listen to a Wichita Junior Leaguer imitate SNL's famous "Coffee Talk" hostess, for whom everything is "like budduh."

Ethnic discomfort notwithstanding, I was thrilled to be at the ranch. I loved the animals (with the exception of the geese, whose beaks pinch), the space, the quiet. I eased into ranch life on Thursday, my first full day, with such activities as collecting eggs (they don't always come out Jumbo white), picking tomatoes, and driving over the prairie in a pickup to inspect calves with a potential buyer. So far, things were easy enough, but, I wondered, what would "working" the cattle be like?

I soon found out. During Friday evening dinner in the bunkhouse we read leaflets on cow psychology (really!) to prepare for the next day's work. As I listened to Jane explain how we would be separating cows from calves, "preg checking" the cows, and vaccinating, branding, and ear-tagging the calves, I looked at my plate. It was Friday night—what was I doing in the middle of nowhere, Kansas, eating cornflake-topped potato casserole when I should have been home with my family eating potato kugel and singing *shabbos zmiros*?

Saturday morning found me staring into a dish of biscuits and gravy, prepared porkless specially for me by Becky, the cook. I was surprised—I no longer keep kosher, and had said nothing—but Becky had heard somewhere that Jews don't eat pork. Touched by her thoughtfulness, I marveled at my breakfast. I had read about biscuits and gravy in books—Ma Joad was always making some in *The Grapes of Wrath*—but I never knew that the gravy was *white*. Listening to my bunkmates exclaim over their food ("my mother used to make this!" and "oh—I haven't had biscuits and gravy in ages!"), I remembered bagels-with-a-shmear.

I soon forgot about food and began thinking about cows. Riding in the back of a flatbed truck, road dust blowing into my hair, I watched the ranch house disappear as we drove toward the pasture where some thirty heifers and their calves waited. I don't remember what happened next—all I know is that moments later my fellow adventurers and I were standing in a wide open field, our arms spread out at our sides, the ground shaking. Long before we could see a single cow running towards us, we felt the herd through the trembling earth. I was scared.

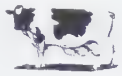
Would she have made a crack about watermelon or collard greens to a Black guest?

Now, Jane's pamphlet on cow psychology says that cows will try to avoid humans, but standing and listening to what felt like a stampede, I didn't really feel like testing the hypothesis. The closer the cows came, the faster I ran backwards in the tall grass, like a scene from "City Slickers." Arlene, the head ranch hand, began to laugh.

Now we were ready to "work" the heifers. Some brave women got right into the chute—the narrow runway leading from the pen—*with the cows*, to get them to line up in front of the "squeeze," a large metal contraption which holds the animal stationary for vaccinating, tagging, etc.. Because I preferred keeping a barrier between me and the bovines—remember, these are not sweet, docile dairy cows who are used to being milked—I volunteered to operate one of the levers in the squeeze. Here's how it worked:

Therese and Mel prodded a few cows into the chute, where Debbie and Diana waited with large wooden poles, which they placed between the cows to make sure only one at a time entered the squeeze. From the chute, the cow at the front of the line would run into the squeeze, and as soon as its horns had passed through the first hold, Becky would pull on her lever to lock the hold around its neck. That was my cue to pull on my lever, which drew the metal sides of the squeeze together, holding the body of the cow in place. At that point, the vet slid his arm, encased in a long rubber sleeve and

well lubricated, into the cow's anus to feel if she was pregnant, and Arlene sometimes looked in the cow's nostrils. Then I released the squeeze by pulling yet another lever, and we moved on to the next cow.



It was hard work. By the time we rode back to bunkhouse for lunch I was covered with manure and sweat, and my arms and back were aching. I didn't care—maybe it was only endorphins, but I was thrilled with the work I had done. Washing my hands before lunch, I examined the unfamiliar face in the mirror—freckled, sunburned and perspiring, hair flecked with cow dung—and smiled. This was a new me, one I had always known was there but who had lain dormant for years under neatly combed hair, dutifully moisturized hands, and control-top pantyhose.

At lunch Jane asked what my family would think if they could see me now, splattered as I was with manure. "They wouldn't believe it," I laughed. "What if we told them it was kosher manure?" she grinned. My face fell, and I was barely able to choke out "I don't think it would make a difference." Why had she said that? *I* certainly didn't find it funny, but others at the table were laughing. I liked Jane, but felt suddenly wary. She had made a joke at my expense to entertain the others. And not just any joke—a joke about my Judaism—to the Christian majority. Would she have made a crack about watermelon or collard greens to a Black guest? I doubt it.

Jane's comment, to be fair, was made with no malicious intent. It was the result, rather, of a strange combination of ignorance, curiosity, genuine good will, and a healthy shot of the outdated stereotyping which I encountered from quite a few women at the ranch (guests more than staff). One sister cowgirl said to me, "I never met a Jewish person before, and I assume *you're. . . .* " She couldn't bring herself to say it. "Yes, I'm Jewish," I told her. "Are all Jewish people supposed to live in Israel?" she asked. (Many non-Jews unfamiliar with Jews, I learned, consider it impolite to refer to someone as a Jew—the polite expression apparently is "Jewish person.") I started to laugh as I told her no, Jews don't have to live in Israel. It's the Jewish state, I explained. I got a blank, puzzled look. Another bunkmate got wind of the conversation and asked me her own question about Israel. Before I knew what was happening, I was lecturing about the Balfour Declaration, the War of Independence, and—in response to the question "if there's no Palestine, how can there be Palestinians?"—the Intifada.

When the discussion finally wound down, I went to ask Jane for some prairie grass to take back home to decorate my *succah*. She gave me several of her own beautiful bunches—dried, beribboned, and ready for the long trip home. And two days later, on the first night of *succot*, there they stood, as I looked at the all-male *ushpizin* poster (the list of biblical figures invited as imaginary guests to our *succah*). It was an interesting mix, to say the least.

Will I ever find a place where all my varied identities can be comfortable? In Israel I am an "anglo," in the States I am a Jew, and no matter where I go I am marginalized as a woman and—except for some places I've worked—feared, ridiculed, or loathed as a feminist. It seems I will always have to choose one aspect of my being over another. I can live on a kibbutz in Israel, nourishing the Jew and the farmer/rancher in me, but neglecting the American feminist woman. Or I can work the land with other American feminists and sacrifice my need for a Jewish community. And although Israel's religious laws often infuriated me when I lived there (particularly on *shabbat*, when the buses did not run), I miss the security of living in the Jewish homeland.

Photo by Kate Kiernat

The author, manure-stained gloves, and ranch totem, after a hard day's work.

So now I live in the New York area, somewhere between Matfield Green and Jerusalem. I can easily find Jewish feminists here, and it's definitely America. Still, there aren't many days when I don't think of the ranch, just as few days pass without my being subjected to sexist comments, ads, or jokes. As for anti-semitism, I don't come across it quite as often, though when I do it frightens me in ways sexism—or even misogyny—never does.

The next step? I hope to get back to the ranch for this year's weaning, though I can't if the dates conflict with the High Holidays, and I'm planning a trip to Israel this winter. In the meantime, I look forward to putting up the prairie grass in the *succah* this year—and maybe even to hanging up a female *ushpizin* poster. ■

Want to be a Prairie Woman? Contact Rhea Miller at the Homestead Ranch: PO Box 2, Matfield Green, KS 66862, (316) 753-3466, for rates and information on calving, weaning, other "roundup" weekends, and special events.

Photo on pages 14-15 by Karen Prager.

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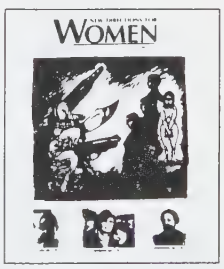

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White Jewish Female

What happens when I fit into more than one category?

by Hadar Dubowsky

I was drawn to a New York conference called "Organizing for Social Change: Fighting Racism and the Politics of Division," because it was one of the only multicultural conferences I'd ever seen where Jews were to be included as Jews. Clues to me that this gathering (sponsored by the North Star Foundation) would be different included the facts that the advance listed Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) as an active player in the conference planning, kosher meals were offered and the title of a series of workshops on "People's Histories" included "Jewish-Americans" as one of the choices.

Speaking on the opening panel, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Executive Director of JFREJ, asked the audience of nearly two thousand, "Will those who feel comfortable standing up and identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual, please do so." From the crowd, about 150 people rose and the auditorium filled with applause. Then, she asked "Will those who feel comfortable identifying as Jews, please rise."

With a bit of shuffling and hesitation, Jewish women and men stood, comprising 30 percent in an auditorium of 1500 people, and once again the room rippled with applause. For some of these Jewish activists, it was the first time they had ever identified publicly as Jews. "I never identified as a Jew before," one woman said later on in the day. Her voice trembled and she began to cry. "I don't *know* what being Jewish means to me."

As for me, standing in the doorway with a lavender armband identifying me as a member of the "crowd-control team," I was caught off-guard. Although I work professionally in the Jewish world and identify strongly as a Jew, I had come to this conference with my karate school, the Center for Anti-Violence Education/Brooklyn Women's Martial Arts, which had been asked to help with security for the conference. And even though I had brought a stack of LILITH flyers, I deposited them quickly, put on my armband and joined my friends from the Center. Without really thinking about it, in this environment, I wanted to be identified with a multi-cultural organization, *not* a Jewish one.

And yet, all the while, my Inner Jew was lurking and listening, cautious, and afraid. "Remember, this conference is being held on *shabbas*," she whispered. "Don't forget, anti-Semitism is out there. Don't forget, scratch a *goy* and you'll find an anti-Semite."

I wanted to quiet that scared, mistrustful voice which carried the historical memory of an oppressed people long enough to be able to look at racism, my own racism and my privilege as a white woman. Long enough to be able to ask myself whether my discomfort was coming from my intuitive sense's picking up undertones of anti-Semitism or whether I didn't feel "at home" in this multicultural, multiracial environment because "home" had meant for me "white, middle class Jews."

Throughout the two-day conference I moved back and forth between identifying primarily as "white," as "Jew," and as "woman." I felt compelled to identify myself as "white" to acknowledge both my skin-color privilege and the racism that people of color face everyday. I agreed with Cornel West, Director of the African American Studies Program at Princeton University, opening speaker at the conference, who said: "Whiteness is a construct. They were Sicilian. They were Irish. They were Yugoslavian. They became white when they came to America and met *me.*"

I wasn't the only Jewish woman at the conference faced with the question of how to identify myself in this multicultural environment. When Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz spoke, she identified herself as a Jew and a lesbian but did not use the word "white." Afterwards, a woman expressed her anger at this. "I don't care if you're a lesbian or a Jew, you're a *white woman,*" she asserted. Another panelist, Don Kao, Director of Project Reach, pointed out that even as an Asian he had to identify himself as a man having male privilege.

Kaye/Kantrowitz responded to the woman's criticism by saying that that her focus on her Jewish and lesbian identities was not meant as a form of "opting out or getting off the hook,"

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz speaking on racism, cultural diversity and self respect at a recent conference on social justice.

Jewish Groups Can Organize Against Racism

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) was formed in 1990 in response to the increase in racial and ethnic tension, violence and economic disparities within New York City. Working collectively, it aims to "establish a clear and outspoken Jewish presence" in the social justice movements and to "enlarge and strengthen the community of Jews who are actively working for racial and economic justice." Here are some suggestions adapted from their literature:

1. Joint programs.
Contact a local church, advocacy group, community organization or student group to see if they are interested in working on a joint program. Multi-racial, multi-religious coalitions offer important resources of people, time, money and moral support. Decision-making should be shared and events should take place in both or a variety of locations. Possible activities or topics include: community issues such as education, health care, affordable housing, biased violence , etc., an educational series and cultural events.

2. Financial decisions of your group/synagogue.
Even small synagogues operate in part as businesses. Make sure that your synagogue is using its business role in a proactive way to confront racism. Options include:

- Whenever possible, purchase goods and services from businesses with good labor practices, including minority and women-owned businesses.
- Make sure your synagogue's investments don't promote racism abroad or at home. Invest at least some of the synagogue's reserves in community development banks, credit unions or loan funds.
- Review synagogue hiring practices. Ensure that there are no discriminatory practices: i.e. can service workers advance, gain skills and better wages?

3. Workshops, discussion groups and speakers.
Many Jews express a hunger to respond to and examine race relations and racism in a Jewish environment. Anti-racism consciousness raising groups, reading groups and speakers are some ways that Jews amongst themselves can share concerns, develop a better understanding of racism and build skills to confront racism and racist institutions. JFREJ offers workshops and a Speaker's Bureau, especially on issues of racism, anti-semitism and Black-Jewish relations. JFREJ is available to help plan and arrange such events and to help develop ideas into full-scale action strategies.

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice
200 West 72nd Street #49, NY. NY 10023
(212)721-3585, FAX: (212) 721-3798

but a way of explaining her connection and commitment to the struggle. "The numbers of Jews here is not accidental," she noted. "We are not here in spite of our Jewishness but because of it."

For some Jews, the conference became a way to connecting with their Jewishness. Marla Brettschneider, a Jewish feminist activist and political philosopher, felt a real hunger for knowledge from the Jews who attended the workshop on Jewish-American history. "Here were people ranging in age from 20 to 60, who had been doing multicultural and anti-racism work for years, who felt at a loss when it came to a sense of their own history as Jews."

My feminist Wild Woman was also at the conference, watching and waiting. She began to growl with rage at the workshop on Project C.U.R.E. (Communication, Understanding, Respect, Education), a joint African American/Hassidic project in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. The four male speakers, Dr. David Lazerson, Mr. Richard Green and two teenagers, talked about and showed videos of the basketball games and rap music which brought African-American and Hassidic boys together. My feminist Wild Woman noted: if boys do it, it's a political coalition complete with government funding; if girls do it, it's nothing. An African-American woman in the audience pointed out that the girls in her community enjoy basketball as much as the boys, "So why aren't girls included in the project?" Mr. Green replied that the organizers wanted to respect the gender divisions within the Hassidic community and that, although it was a problem, gender inequality was not the battle they were choosing to face. "Were there any projects just for girls from both communities to come together, separate from the boys?" I asked. The answer was no.

> My Inner Jew was lurking. "Remember this conference is on *Shabbas,*" she whispered.

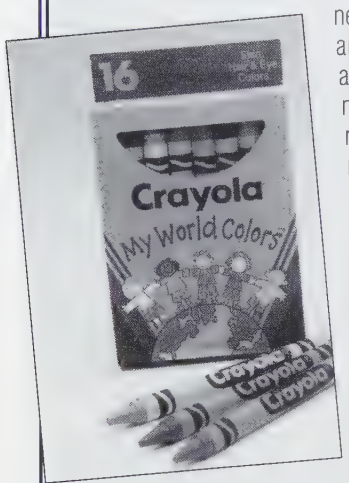
It was a hard conference for me, as I moved from feeling defeated to compassionate to angry to optimistic. At times, I was angry that more Jews weren't there, willing to join with others to work towards social change and an end to racism. At other times, I was angry that the people I met, including Jews, had so little understanding of Jewish history and the manifestations of anti-Semitism. I was angry when I felt that women's issues were left behind and angry when gay/lesbian issues were left behind.

But I also felt hopeful and energized to see thousands of people from a range of ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds come together for a weekend of workshops, lectures, discussions and performances. At one point I was sitting in the auditorium, two rows behind the headphones hooked up for Spanish translation, in front of the woman signing in ASL on the stage before me, a row behind a woman in a wheelchair, watching a multi-ethnic group of teenagers perform an improv skit about violence and fighting between different cliques at a high school. I left the conference reaffirmed in my belief that the best way to work on both racism in the Jewish community and anti-semitism in other communities is for Jews to be an integral and active part of multicultural and anti-racist organizations, conferences and communities. It's not easy, and as Cornel West told participants: "the examined life is painful, risky and full of vulnerability"—but it's worth it. ■

I'm Tired of Checking Off "Other"

In my last two years of Colgate University I stepped out of my comfortable community of young Jewish women to work in various feminist organizations. I worked in a women's film production company, spent a summer with a multicultural feminist organization and attended countless meetings and workshops on women's issues. I felt powerful seeing so many women of my own age from diverse backgrounds getting involved in this "third wave" of feminism.

It was at this point that I had to deal directly, for the first time, with the issue of my uncatagorizeable appearance. I grew up simply passing for whatever people assumed I was. My family is a mix of Sephardic and Ashkenazi, but I ended up looking almost entirely Sephardic. My dark hair and skin tone never meant much more to me than jokes about whether I was really related to everyone else in my family and my grandmother's calling me her "black child". My father, who has always worn his Jewish star on the inside of his shirt, taught me not to make trouble for myself. So I never gave much thought to my appearance even when I would be followed around by security guards in department stores or spoken to in Spanish. I rarely corrected anyone, because I saw no point in exchanging racism for anti-Semitism.



It was in multicultural organizations that my identity came into question, over and over again, as people assumed that I was Latin-American. I felt support and encouragement, from the men and women around me until I realized that many people's interest was not in me but in what they thought I was. Once I said I was Jewish, not Latina, I felt people's interest in me diminish. It was painful to realize that though my appearance remained the same, my value as a person within a self-consciously multicultural context lessened because I was a Jew.

Here's one example of an experience I had with my sister intern at the feminist production company who was Latin. We were both treated equally well until I realized that our advisors had assumed that I too was Latin-American. After I corrected them, we were treated very differently. The irony of the situation was that my co-worker, with her white skin, brown hair and green eyes was the direct descendent of Russian Jews who had immigrated to Argentina. She was indeed from Latin America, but was not the cultural icon she was taken to be.

Rather than leading to a fuller understanding of other cultures the current ideology of multiculturalism, seems to me to have led to the social acceptability of certain prejudices. In my person-of-color persona, I have had women of color confide to me that they cannot believe that white women ever feel any pain. When I have questioned why white women within a multicultural feminist organization were being ignored, many different women have given me the same explanation; that white women have been allowed to speak for thousands of years, and therefore should be quiet and let others speak. With this silencing of white women's voices, with no feminist understanding of how *all* women have been stifled by patriarchy, went the voices of Jewish women as well.

I had thought that the popularity of ethnicity brought by multiculturalism would make it easier to be visibly Jewish. The wave of multiculturalism, on campuses and other contexts, not only excludes Jews, but in fact, often represents Jews as an especially oppressive group. I can't talk about anti-Semitism without hearing that Jews are rich and politically powerful. I can't mention the Holocaust without other group members comparing it to the over 60 million Africans who died on slaves ships to the New World. I am constantly asked to justify the displacement and murders of Palestinians as though I could speak for all Jews. These responses silence me by making me feel guilty for being a Jew.

Multiculturalism, as I have experienced it, separates people into two groups: either you are a person of color or you are white. The term "person of color" generally means anyone of African-American, Latin-American, Asian-American and Native-American descent. These complicated identities and definitions are important because ultimately the affect political policies and agendas. They affect who gets encouraged, who gets published, and who gets hired. These same definitions also dictate who gets silenced.

These delineations are reflected in all of our standardized forms. In an attempt to be politically correct, "race" has been changed to "ethnicity," but the choices have remained the same. There is never a space on these forms for who I am. There is a never a box for "Jewish" and rarely one for "Middle-Eastern." I am tired of having to check off "other" for who I am.

People don't know how to categorize Jews within this multicultural view of the world. We fit comfortably neither with whites nor with people of color. Our identities and concerns get lost in this confusion. When I have tried to explain that Jews are a people with their own culture, I have been told by my African-American college deans that Jews are white and that Judaism is "simply" a religion. I have been prevented from defining myself in my own terms by people who have fought hard to define themselves.

It is not that I want Jews to be grouped with people of color or for whites to welcome us into their community with open arms. I don't think we belong in either place. I simply want us to be respected for who we are, *as Jews*, and not as something else. I am tired of justifying my presence as a Jew by saying that I am also Middle-Eastern. I don't want the privilege of being allowed to speak because I am of Middle-Eastern descent if I cannot speak as a Jew and as a feminist.

We live in a world with multi-faceted identities and each person fights many different battles. As a Jewish feminist, I cannot join safely with the Jewish community to fight anti-Semitism without also facing sexism and homophobia. And at the same time I cannot work within feminism to eliminate sexism if racism, homophobia and anti-Semitism are still present there. Multiculturalism must work to build bridges and to find common ground rather than to silence people and to perpetuate stereotypes.

—Robin Beth Schaer

Mother Tongue

a short story by Alina Sivorinovsky

An illustration from a Russian children's book, 1971.

Мама по́ саду пойдёт,
Мама с дерева сорвёт
Туфельки, сапожки,
Новые калошки.

Эй вы, ребятки,
Голые пятки,
Рваные сапожки,
Драные калошки.

I lied to them. I said, "Of course, if you want, I will speak to your baby only in English."

But they still looked skeptical. Mr. Appelblom turned to Mrs. Appelblom and, when he thought I was not watching, he raised one eyebrow and cocked his head to the side. Mrs. Appelblom shrugged her shoulders. Well, actually, she twitched them. She hiccoughed her neck, that is what she did, and asked, "How old did you say you were, again, dear?"

"Seventeen." I could not lie about that. They would see the truth on my green card.

"Seventeen." She tapped her fingers like playing a piano and clicked her tongue against her lip. "That's awfully young."

Maybe. Maybe it is awfully young, when you have passed the seventeen years doing nothing more than going to school and arguing with your mother over how late to get home on a Friday night. But after spending the last six months deciding which belongings to keep and which to leave, saying goodbye to my parents, my home, my friends, and climbing alone on a train that would eventually take me from Odessa, U.S.S.R., to Vienna, Austria, to Rome, Italy, to a 747 Jumbo Jet bound for New York, to a one room studio on the seventh floor of an apartment building in San Francisco, after spending hour after hour waiting and filling out forms inside the Immigration offices, and then desperately reading the newspaper and following up every hint of a job opportunity all the while remembering that if I do not find work within a year they will send me back to the newly collapsed Soviet Union where my parents could not in any way afford to keep me, if that was the way everyone felt at seventeen, then I would not say it was awfully young at all.

Of course, I cannot tell the Appelbloms that. I do not have the right words or verb tenses to make them understand. So, instead, I only say, "I have much experience working with children. I am very responsible."

More looks, more shrugs, more wordless conversations between husband and wife that I am not supposed to understand, but I do, because people in America are not really so different from those in my old home which I should not think about because if I do I will start to miss people and risk crying. I come from a family of very loud, very expressive Jews for whom gestures are as much a part of the conversation as any mere words, so I can guess what every little Appelblom twitch means.

Finally, they both reach agreement. Mrs. Appelblom gives a little shake of her head from side to side, like meaning, "It could be better, but it could be worse," and Mr. Appelblom takes a deep breath so that both his nostrils expand into perfect circles like a figure eight, and nods his chin, once, but sharply, stamping the final punctuation on their silent discussion. They turn to me with smiles on their faces. Smiles that stretch their mouths, yet do not quite reach their eyes, which still show sprinkles of uncertainty.

But I will accept a half-faced smile. It means they are giving me the job.

It is not too difficult, working as a nanny for a ten month old girl. She is a good child. She eats what is set in front of her. Of course, American baby food looks so delicious, I eat it myself. I lick the bottom of the jars after little Melissa has finished. I do not think her parents will mind. They have so much of it stacked in their cupboards. and I am always careful to eat only what Melissa does not finish. Otherwise, the Appelbloms would just throw it away. I did not believe it until I saw them, but that is what they do here with leftovers.

I remember my father buying a bushel of potatoes and storing them under the bed in my mother's old nylons for the winter. We ate the spoiled spuds first, before they grew even more rotten, and left the good ones for later. My father used to say his greatest wish in life was, just once, to eat a potato before it went bad and had to be fried to hide the bitter taste.

My father would like the potatoes in America. Once I show U.S. Immigration that I can keep a job and not be a drain on their society, they will give me permanent residence status, and I can bring my father to America. And my mother. And my aunts and my uncles and my grandparents. And my little brother who when I left still sounded like a child, but who now when I call has a voice so deep I mistake him for my father.

So, for now, I take extra good care of Melissa Appelblom.

Her parents have very definite ideas on how she should be raised. Everything on a schedule, everything in its place. They only speak proper English to Melissa. No baby talk. And when I offered to talk to her in Russian, so that Melissa could grow up bilingual, they said, "Oh, no. No, you mustn't do that," and opened their eyes wide like I had suggested teaching Melissa to swim by tossing her off a pier.

They are very strict about nap time. She must have three hours of sleep every afternoon between one and four, or else she becomes cranky at dinnertime and interrupts her parents while they are eating. I watch the clock carefully, making sure to put Melissa down exactly at one, and refusing to lift her out of the crib until three hours have passed. If she starts to cry, I offer her a stuffed toy, or pat her back.

Only today, she wouldn't let either method work. I spent close to an hour trying to get her to sleep. I fed her, I changed her, I took her temperature, but still, she would not stop crying. I even gave her a pacifier, which Mrs. Appelblom is one hundred percent against, but Melissa only sucked for a moment, then spit it out with a loud "phwue" and let it float on a rivulet of saliva down her cheek.

So I sang to her. I sang the same lullaby my mother used to sing to me when I was little. I sang in Russian, of course, and comforted myself with the rationalization that I had promised never to speak to Melissa in a foreign language, but had taken no vows about singing to her. She quieted down almost immediately. Rolled over on her stomach, bottom in the air, one cheek resting on a lacy pink and white pillow, and went straight to sleep. How was I to know she'd become addicted?

At first it was only one lullaby before nap time. Then two, then five. And then she only wanted me to speak to her in Russian. I could tell, because whenever I would even try to piece together a sentence in my from-the-textbook, heavily accented, strained English, Melissa would hop up and down in her crib until the mattress squeaked, pound a tiny fist against the bars, and babble in what I am sure she thought was a language of her own. When I gave up and switched to Russian, she smiled and held out her arms for me to pick her up.

> "Speak English," I told her, but she only giggled and said "Sok. Dai. Moi."

Maybe I only imagined that Melissa preferred my speaking Russian. Maybe I was just using her as an excuse to make my life easier; but it was maddening, spending an entire day tripping over a language so complicated it made my tongue hurt just to speak it. On the bus ride after work, I recited Russian poetry and talked to myself, trying to clear my head. It rarely worked. By the time I arrived home, my thoughts were such a jumbled mass of half-English, half-Russian, and a little Yiddish thrown in for good measure, that even I didn't understand them.

Yet as soon as I switched to Russian with Melissa, not only did the confusion stop, but I think the baby started liking me better. Because I wasn't so nervous anymore. And I could put real emotions behind my words now, not just definitions I'd read out of the dictionary.

I didn't even realize what I was doing, until, one morning, Melissa Appelblom looked right at me and said, so clearly that no one could pretend it was just a syllable of baby-babble, "Sok," which is Russian for juice. Then, as if to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was not referring to footwear, Melissa pointed to the bottle of apple juice I had just brought in, and made sucking noises.

I took a step backwards. Despite being three weeks short of her first birthday, Melissa had yet to utter a word that could be interpreted as having any meaning beyond mere sound. Her parents were very worried. Both their bedside tables were piled two feet high with books on child development, the passages on speech highlighted in pink and yellow markers.

And here Melissa was. Talking. Uttering her first word. But it was hardly one I could rush to tell her parents about.

"No." I told her in English.

"Nyet." She agreed with me in Russian.

"Speak English," I told her.

She only giggled. "Sok. Dai. Moi." Juice. Give. Mine.

"Oy vey," I thought, and quickly clamped a hand over my mouth, lest I inadvertently teach her Yiddish , too.

Her parents were going to kill me. Worse. They were going to fire me.

I told Melissa, "You must only to speak English."

"Da," she agreed.

I was afraid to take her out of the house. What if, during our walk, we ran into someone her parents knew? And what if Melissa then opened her pretty, pink mouth and quoted Tolstoy?

Mr. Appelblom called Melissa from work, as he always does, at noon. They play this game, where Daddy sings her nursery rhymes over the phone, and Melissa drools into the receiver.

I thought to tell him Melissa was sleeping. But then he might think she was ill, and want to come home. I thought to tell him she was busy eating. But then he would only call back later. And who knows what new words she might know by then?

So I gave Melissa the phone. My stomach tightened to the size of a tennis ball. My hands shook so much I couldn't hold Melissa's ear steady with the receiver. She took it from me. I could hear Mr. Appelblom singing loudly on the other end. Something about silverware running off with a cow. Melissa listened. I held my breath. Melissa looked at the receiver and opened her mouth. I wondered if a worker's visa entitiled me to unemployment insurance. Melissa

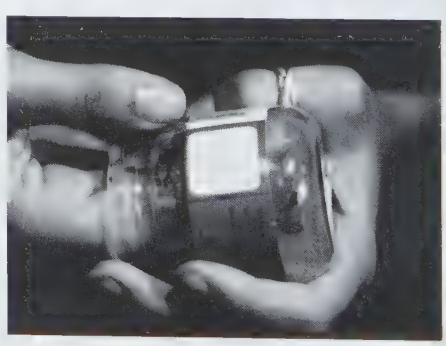


Photo by: Robin Roth and David Schaer

brought the bottom of the receiver towards her lip. And bit it.

For the rest of the day, all I could do was worry. What if Melissa never learned to speak English? What if I had done some sort of linguistic damage that could never be corrected? I leafed through the child development books, but their language was too complex for my English. Besides, none offered a chapter on how to get a child to stop talking once she had started.

The Appelbloms were certain to fire me. But would they take me to court? Americans like to sue people. I know because there are so many television shows about it.

By five-thirty, I felt so nervous that every sound shot up my nervous system like a bullet. I imagined I heard the garage door opening a half hour before the Appelbloms were due home. I jumped each time the phone rang.

Meanwhile, Melissa sat beside me in the playpen, stringing together her six word Russian vocabulary into sentences that, while grammatically nonsensical, were clearly identifiable as most certainly not English.

I grabbed my jacket and slipped out the back door the moment Mr. and Mrs. Appelblom came home. I didn't want to be there when they figured out what I'd done to their daughter.

On the bus, I read posters over my seat. The ones offfering to train people in new and exciting careers as dental assistants and welders. I wondered how long the courses took and if I'd be able to afford them and whether U.S. Immigration would consider that work and not make me go back right away.

My telephone was ringing, even as I slipped my key into the lock. When I picked up the receiver, Mrs. Appelblom's voice came as a relief. At least I could stop waiting for the log to fall on my head, and just get it over with.

"You'll never believe it." She did not sound at all the way I thought she would. But then, maybe people get angry differently in America. "Melissa finally said her first word."

"Oh. Really?" I sounded like a choking frog. Dry mouth.

"And do you know what it was?"

I thought about the list she'd recitied for me that afternoon, and did not dare take a guess. "What?"

"Mama."

Alina Sivorinovsky was born in Odessa, Ukraine, and came to the United States in 1977 at the age of seven. She currently lives in San Francisco.

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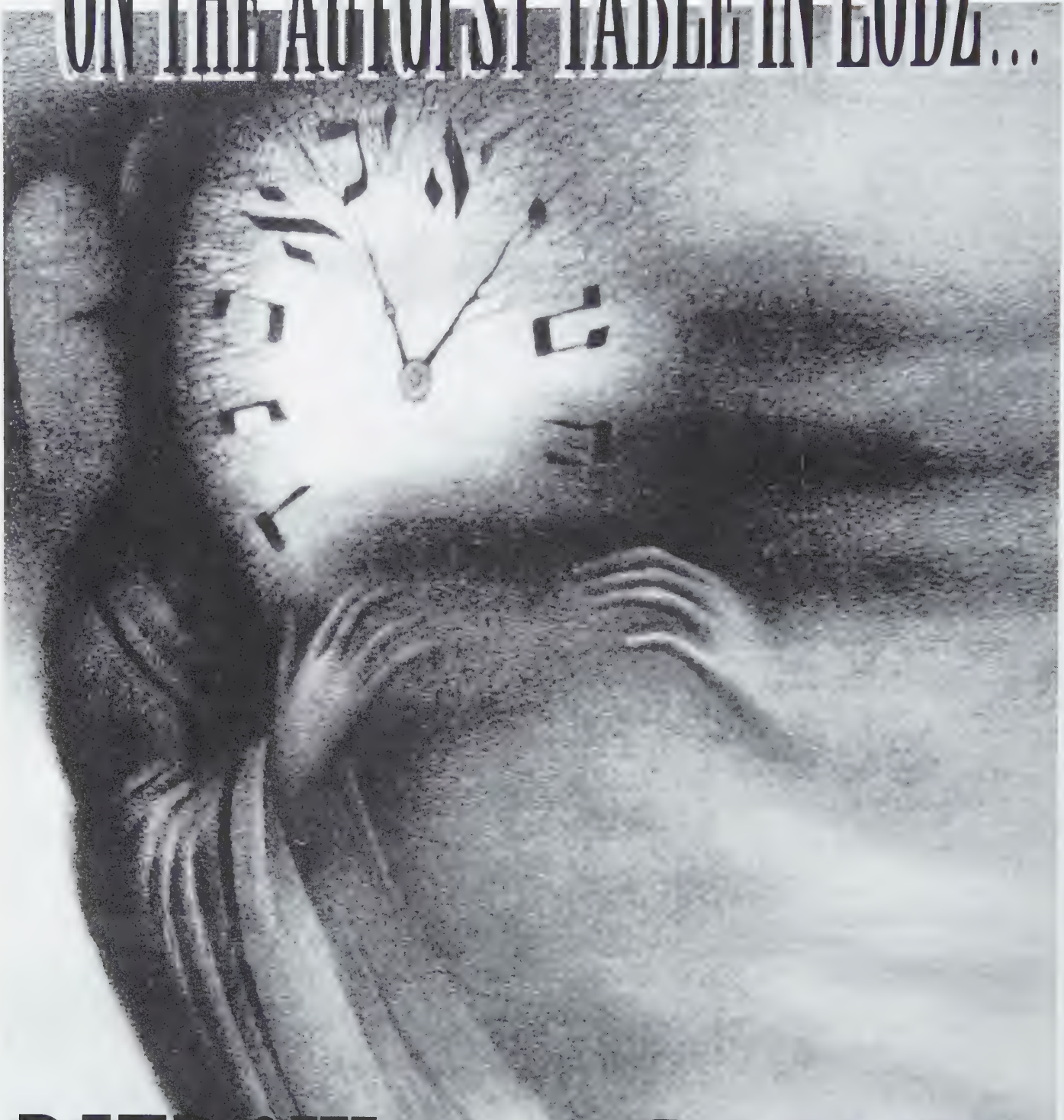
ON THE AUTOPSY TABLE IN LODZ...



BIEBOW FROM BREMEN

A Memoir By SALOMEA KAPE

"Time" by Jarmila Maranova

"Sally, come quick to the Anatomy Building."

The excited voices of my Jewish friends reached me at chemistry class. Here I was in Lodz, in 1947, a first-year medical student absorbed in my studies of inorganic chemistry. Anatomy was far away, scheduled for next year, but there was some urgency in the voices, and I asked impatiently, "What's going on?"

"Come and see for yourself," answered Sarah, a girl I knew well from the years spent together in the Lodz Ghetto. Reluctantly I left the lab.

As I entered the Anatomy Building, the smell of formalin hit my nostrils and caused a coughing spell, but through the tears I saw a naked body on the table. The skin was leathery, yellowish, covering a rather small body of a middle-aged man. Brown hair draped the skull and thin, purple lips formed a straight line on this rather unremarkable face.

"Sally," Sarah said triumphantly, "take the scalpel and start the dissection of Hans Biebow."

HANS BIEBOW!

I looked at the exposed body again. The narrow forehead, the shape of the jaw, were the sole remainders of Hans Biebow, the man who liquidated the Jews of Lodz.

Is it the same Biebow, the tall, blond beast straight from Nietzsche's description of a German "*Ubermensch*?"

Is it Biebow, the six-foot-tall Wagnerian god in shiny black boots, whip in hand?

What happened to the golden hair, the cold blue eyes? That's how I remember him as he stood on the podium during the eradication of Lodz Ghetto in the summer of 1944. I was then eighteen.

"*Meine Juden*," my Jews, he called us. The July sun highlighted the blondness of his hair, embossing it in gold. "Leave the Ghetto voluntarily. At the railroad station in Marysin, trains are waiting for you. I shall relocate you to the West where there are better living conditions for you, good work, and more food. Take with you all your personal belongings and don't forget the pots and pans."

"The pots and pans"—a simple and deceiving phrase, for if pots are needed, there must be *food* in the West!

Where did Biebow learn the psychological trick of mentioning small homely details to give the deportation an air of normalcy? He had vast experience liquidating smaller Jewish ghettos around Lodz and deception always worked. But only the naive truly believed the gilded giant who put himself on a pedestal to tower over a crowd of Jews in rags, their bodies ravaged by hunger. He was a Siegfried from a Beggars' Opera.

I was among the crowd of listeners, and when the sun caressed Biebow's blond head I felt that God had abandoned us and had joined the company of Biebows.

The Russian troops stopped their advance on the east bank of the Vistula river, 75 miles from Lodz. The forces of war played against us. During the summer months, Biebow sent the remaining eighty thousand Jews from Lodz straight into the ovens at Auschwitz. The pots and pans were neatly collected in Auschwitz and sent to German *hausfraus*. "Let's go to the railroad station," I pleaded with my mother, who was the driving force of my family in the Ghetto. "The Gestapo already have started their Actions and they will remove us by force."

My mother, barely five feet tall, didn't agree with me, nor did she believe in Biebow's "pots and pans."

"I prefer to stay and die in Lodz. I don't know where they are sending us," was her answer. Later in the summer, however, she took my father and me to Baluter Ring, a square in the Ghetto where selections were made.

There Biebow was choosing a cleaning commando of six hundred Jews to remove what was left of his kingdom called Litzmannstadt Ghetto—the name he had given to Lodz. The Ghetto was for Biebow a gold mine, a Klondike—as well as a shelter from the dreaded Eastern front.

Now Biebow made his final selection, and, with a jerky movement of his whip, he sent people to the right or left. His ice-cold, sky-blue eyes looked at my thin mother, my swollen-from-hunger father, and—without glancing at me—he pushed us with the end of his whip to the left, where children, sick-looking, and old people were already waiting. We went obediently to the left, but when Biebow turned to the next line, my mother quickly pushed us back to the right.

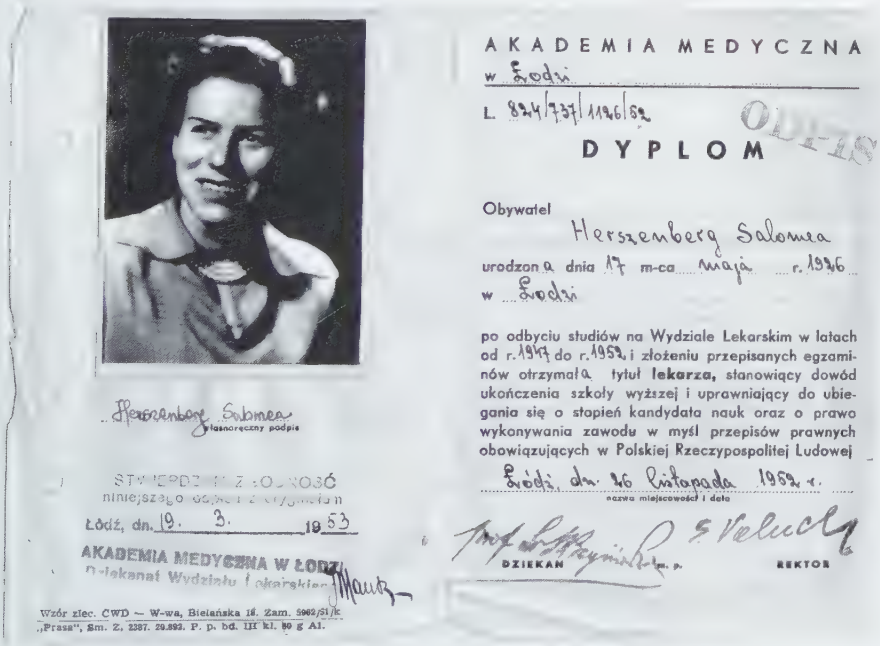
I was assigned work in a stable, helping to clean the horses which were needed for transportation around the remains of the Ghetto. Biebow was a frequent visitor, and he often came to the stables with his eight-year-old son.

"Papa," cried, the little boy, "the horse is dirty." I knew that Biebow would call the manager of the stable and beat him until his back was a bloody pulp. No matter how we cleaned the horses, the little boy always found a dirty spot. I hated the horses, the blondness of father and son. I wondered why we called the lowest human instincts of hatred and violence "dark" forces when they should be called "blond" ones.

Biebow was an attentive and loving father, and with the utmost patience he taught the little boy to shoot the few birds flying over the Ghetto. It was the first time I saw him as a father, a person, which was a revelation to me. For me he was a non-person, a death machine. Sometimes I wonder what happened to the little boy. Does he carry the sadistic genes? Does he remember the bloody massacres performed by his father in Lodz Ghetto?

A half century later, I ask my Lodz Ghetto friend Esther, who recently visited Bremen (Biebow's native city), if anyone there remembers the Biebow family. Hans was a well-known businessman there. "Do you remember his little shopping bags distributed in the Ghetto?" I ask Esther. "They said, '*Hans*

Why do we call the lowest human instincts dark forces when they should be blond ones?



Herszenberg Salomea
własnoręczny podpis

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DZIEKAN — REKTOR

The author's medical diploma, issued by the Medical Academy in Lodz, Poland, November 26, 1952.

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Edited by J. J. Goldberg and Elliot King

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Biebow, Coffee Export, Bremen.' There must be somebody in Bremen who knows of the son, who remembers the family."

"I asked many times," answers Esther, "but nobody has ever even heard of the name."

And so the name disappeared from the annals of the city, a small name in the history of Nazi Germany, not a Hitler, a Mengele, or a Himmler, but for us—the former inhabitants of Lodz Ghetto—a name synonymous with the destruction of the Jews of Lodz.

Selections continued, and always a group of Jews were taken from the morning role call and sent to a death camp.

On the other hand, almost every day a group of people were found in some hiding place and joined us in the camp. There was no need to waste bullets on these Jews—sooner or later the cleaning of the Ghetto would be over, and the final solution for the tiny remnant of Jews would take place as a mass execution by the prepared grave in the Jewish cemetery.

But in one of the hiding places, in a cellar, Biebow encountered resistance.

Dr. Daniel Weiskopf, a Ghetto doctor who didn't have medications for his patients and who looked on with despair as they died of starvation and rampant tuberculosis, wounded Biebow with the only weapon he had in his hand—a knife. Before he was killed he told Biebow, "Murderer, blood of innocent people is on your hands! Your days are numbered!"

Daniel Weiskopf's last hour was his finest; he died a free man. His death shook the camp, and the white dressing on Biebow's blond head was for us like a flag of freedom; a monument to the brave doctor.

Biebow was not the same man after Weiskopf's death. Maybe he was haunted by the murdered doctor's prophecy as well as horrified by the thunder of Russian cannons. He was now often drunk and would appear suddenly in the middle of the night and order some young girls to undress, observing them in a drunken stupor. He didn't rape them but he took a perverse pleasure in looking at the naked bodies and the fear in the girls' eyes. Here he was, in the middle of the night, the hangman of Lodz Ghetto, finding his life pleasures in the thin, naked bodies of Jewish girls.

We greeted the New Year of 1945 with hope and joy, seeing masses of Germans running west with their belongings. They fled in cars, on foot, in bicycles, pushing each other into the gutter in their "*Drang nach Western* [drive to the west]." The air of superiority was gone and so was the blondness; an odor of defeat emanated from their bodies. Panic changed their Aryan faces to a sweaty, fear-stricken physiognomy; also gone was the proverbial German law and order. I enjoyed the winter landscape in Lodz in 1945 very much. The Russians were *ante portas* [at the gates], but our camp was still guarded and the mass grave was waiting for us. The thunder of war was music to my ears, a modern, powerful, "1812 Overture." It was also a belated celebration of Christmas with all the lights in the black sky resembling a giant, cosmic Christmas tree. The sky at night was crisscrossed with arcs of fire; we heard the roar of Russian Katyushas, violent explosions that shook the earth, eerie displays of light and sound.

We survived because Biebow happened not to be in Lodz at that moment, and his deputy—rather than executing the mass—was busy taking care of his own life. Biebow would have been much better organized. The spirit of Daniel Weiskopf dominated the camp, his heroic death opening for us a new dimension in life. Thus we knew that in the absence of guns, a knife, a bat, a piece of heavy iron might be a weapon too. We knew that every one of us could defend herself, and nobody—but nobody—was too young or too old to do so.

In 1947, two years after the end of the war, Biebow was caught in Germany and brought to Poland for trial in Lodz. I went for one court session and I saw a pitiful figure alone on the bench, pleading "not guilty."

"Daniel Weiskopf," I talked in my head: "your murderer has been brought to justice, but my pain, the pain remains. Forever, Daniel, forever?"

"I don't want the knife, Sarah, I don't start anatomy until next year," I said numbly to my friend.

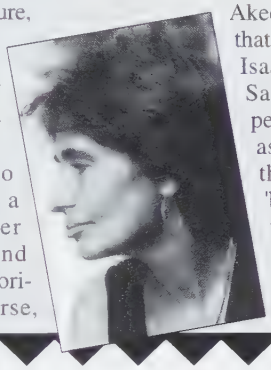
I returned the scalpel to her, and, without taking a second look at the corpse of Biebow, I left the building. Revenge is not in my vocabulary, only the pain of moral victory. ■

Salomea Kape is a retired 66-year-old physician, specializing in anesthesiology. She came to the United States in 1966 and lives in Brooklyn, NY.

REVIEWS

FEMINIST REVISION AND THE BIBLE. *Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Blackwell, 1993, $14.95.*

In her latest book, Rutgers professor and Lilith Poetry Editor Ostriker examines Western literature from the Bible to such nineteenth and twentieth century women writers as Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and H.D., who create their own poetic readings of Biblical narrative. Ostriker moves deftly between the worlds of literary, feminist, and psychoanalytic theories, Biblical scholarship, and poetics, with what she terms a "hermeneutic of desire," using women's writings and her own analyses. She positions herself at the intersection of religion, literature, and politics, with an acute interest in reshaping all three to be more inclusive of *women's* visions and experiences.



The book is divided into three sections. In the first, a series of lectures, Ostriker debunks the male myths and assumptions which have historically ruled Biblical discourse, and exposes the ways in which the authors of the Bible have suppressed "the female." Ostriker believes that there is a textual unconscious which exhibits symbolic, subliminal traces of women within the larger structure of the text. When we think about the Passover story, we rarely think of the role of Miriam in the Exodus, who plays a major part in the beginning of the narrative, but fades into the backgroun by the end. Ostriker reinforces our feminist suspicions that in the end, "Miriam embodies the humiliation and defeat of female influence." By looking closely at the Akedah story we can see, for example, that this classic story of the binding of Isaac has only a loud silence where Sarah's voice should be. What happened with Sarah is a question rarely asked. Ostriker does ask and finds that the scene truly "inscribes the 'binding' of the sons to the theocentric world of the fathers."

The author finds in Biblical gaps and inconsistencies an invitation for feminists to find a role within our textual heritage. Simultaneously, Ostriker opposes previous feminist criticisms, which she feels do more harm than good by creating an antagonistic and adversarial relationship between text and author. Ostriker places herself at a crossroads between looking back and creating anew. She draws her readers into a garden of inquiry rather than into a desert of bitter exile.

Thus, in the second section Ostriker rewrites Biblical discourse in "Lilith Poems." The poems clearly demonstrate that Ostriker is as grounded in her Jewish heritage as she is comfortable with her formal training in literary theory. "As critic and poet, as Jew, woman and human being, I am involved in a collective enterprise which has as its ultimate goal the radical transformation of what used to be called the Judeo-Christian tradition."

The third section of the book is an interview in which Ostriker candidly discusses all of her writings, past and present. While she critiques the androcentric ideology of the Bible, Ostriker says she wants to "wrest a blessing from it nonetheless."

—Sharon Ravitch

The Wild Mother

by Elizabeth Cunningham, Station Hill, 1993, $20.95.

The author of this novel, which belongs to the genre of magic realism, breathes new life into contemporary conceptions of Lilith, Eve, and Adam. While engaged in the highly energetic plot, the reader becomes drawn into the mystery and splendor of the Kabbalah, the Bible, magic and Midrash. The main characters—Lilith, Eva Brooke and Adam Underwood, together with their children—stand at the intersection of the founding myths of Western consciousness and everyday humanity, with lives and concerns which resemble that of the reader. A man and a woman (Adam and Eva) contort themselves in an unrelenting romantic entanglement; a mother, grandmother, daughter and son deal with the tensions and problems of being interdependent family members; and individuals struggle to choose between identities.

Through her telling of this story, Cunningham deconstructs Lilith, achieving no less than a reconsideration of the questions surrounding human understanding of the universe, our relationship with our ecosystem, ourselves and each other.

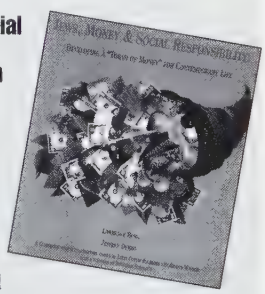
The author re-envisions the heritage of women, beginning with this powerful myth.

Cunningham rewrites the scripts of Adam, Eve, and Lilith, the chimerical "Wild Mother." Lilith, as the "First Woman," left the Garden of her own free will. "She was not cast out of the Garden as the Man and the Second Woman were when they ate of the tree of knowledge. She chose the Wilderness, and the Wilderness welcomed her as it had never welcomed Man, who tried to subdue the Wilderness as he tried to subdue the First Woman," she writes. The result is a novel which replaces old images with new ones, refreshing and invigorating.

The Wild Mother will take you on a journey through another world, one which holds profound implications for the way you envision your own.

—S. R.

Jews, Money & Social Responsibility: Developing a "Torah of Money" for Contemporary Life. Lawrence Bush and Jeffrey Dekro. A Guidebook with Supplementary Essays by Letty Cottin Pogrebin and Arthur Waskow. With a forward by Jonathan Schorsch. Published by The Shefa Fund.



Rabbi Abba bar Acha said:
It is impossible to understand the nature of this people—when they are asked to contribute to the Golden Calf, they give,
and when they are asked to contribute to the building of the Tabernacle, they give.
Shekalilm 1: 1

Pleas against Jews' materialism and neglect of spiritual values (such as the Talmudic example above) are as old as the Prophets. *Jews, Money & Social Responsibility* goes beyond those screes to deal forthrightly and helpfully with sensitive issues about Jews and money through fundamental principles of Jewish guidance.

continued on page 28

continued from page 27

Creatively, Bush and Dekro combine Jewish scholarly sources from diverse interpreters to illustrate that the '60's anthem "If you're not part of the solution you're part of the problem" is almost as basic to Judaism as the Ten Commandments. "The appeal to Jewish religious and historical values. . . deserves greater emphasis in Jewish fundraising circles, for it's Jewish values that can give Jewish philanthropy its unique appeal," they note. The authors use these principles to examine systematically myths and realities about Jews and money that are rarely discussed frankly: financial relations with non-Jews; women's roles in Jewish fundraising; family foundations' and Jewish organizations' roles within the Jewish community; and the fallacy of equating communal leadership with large contributions of money. Their new ideal, described in Arthur Waskow's concluding essay, is the "*tzedakah* collective," an association of families and individuals who together determine how much to give and how to distribute their joint philanthropy.

Maimonides' eight degrees of *tzedakah* are usually the starting points for treatises on Jewish charity. This informative guidebook instead starts as a thorough compendium of practical perspectives on contemporary progressive charity. It's chock full of specifics on techniques and organizations involved in all aspects of socially, environmentally and politically responsible philanthropy in the U.S. and Israel, from consumer choices to investments to charitable giving to community development. The graphics and sidenotes can be visually confusing and repetitive, but a complete bibliography and details on source material are included.

Two-thirds through, Bush and Dekro favorably compare the philanthropic alternatives they've showcased to Maimonides' ideal in order to promulgate their thesis of an ethical "torah of money" that emphasizes "reciprocity, accountability, empowerment, and the encouragement of Jewish communal consciousness."

—Nora L. Mandel

To order, send $18 plus $3 postage and handling to: 7318 Germantown Road, Philadelphia, PA 19119, 215-247-9704.

SPEAKING YIDDISH WITHOUT WORDS

A Profile of Filmmaker Eleanor Antin *by Sara Nuss-Galles*

What do you get when you cross "Fiddler on the Roof," silent film, fictitious history, and a Jewish feminist writer-director-producer? "The Man Without A World" (Milestone Film and Video, 1991, 98 min.)—a postmodern-retro-Yiddish silent film, circa 1928, actually made in 1991. Confused? Let me explain.

Eleanor Antin, creator of the film, is a professor at the University of California, San Diego, and a poet, writer, painter, performance artist and narrative filmmaker. In "The Man Without A World," this long time explorer has undertaken a new and deeply rooted expedition, spurred by her mother's struggle with Alzheimer's disease.

Struggling to reach her retreating mother on a visceral level in recent years, Antin began speaking Yiddish during her visits in the nursing home. Not only did her mother respond, but Antin felt a nascent stirring within herself; a passion for Jewishness that she had abandoned—not for the enduring leftist politics, but for the culture itself. She spent a year devouring books on Yiddish culture and shtetl life, and watching and studying silent films. "The Man Without A World" is Antin's love letter to her mother, a passionate return to *yiddishkeit* [Jewishness].

At the time, Antin had just completed filming "The Last Night of Rasputin," which she attributed to a man of her own creation: a 1920's Russian filmmaker, "Yevgeny Antinov." As *Rasputin's* filmmaker, Antinov, a secular Russian, was exiled to Poland for his failure to be politically correct. With Antin's awakening and exploration, however, Antinov evolved as a Jew. The introduction to "The Man Without A World" tells how the exiled Antinov is approached by two Jewish-American merchants anxious to dabble in culture and to cash in on the Yiddish nostalgia market back home. They commission a "shtetl movie, pure and simple." Antinov, however, injects the film with his characteristic social and political commentary, after which the businessmen abandon the project, reluctant to "throw good money after bad." The film "disappeared into the Holocaust. . . until it showed up in an obscure Odessa archive" after Glasnost.

The plot hinges on the romance between Rukhele and Zevi, lovers derailed by the arrival of the Gypsy wagon, complete with strongman, fortune teller and exotic dancer, seductively played by Antin herself. The shtetl also features Moishe's Cafe, watering hole of the cultural elite, where anarchists read poetry while Zionists and Socialists try to solve the world's problems. Antin presents shtetl life from marketplace to cemetery with the requisite dybbuk, exorcism, pogrom, rape, dying mother, and wedding scenes; she manages the look and projection quality of early films by shooting at 16 frames per second, rather than the usual 24. The stylized facial and bodily expressions of the actors, augmented by title cards and background music, reveal the action clearly.

In her use of sets, acting style, and themes, Antin adheres to the genre's tradition, which requires, of course, that Yevgeny Antinov be male. Antin, a confirmed feminist, reflects: "There were modernist female artists, but the directors of the period were male." Yet her feminist spirit prevails in the women's world revealed in the night-before-the-wedding scene. While the male Antinov cannot resist using back nudity of Rukhele in the *mikveh* [ritual bath, off-limits to men], the female Antin stages the scene as "girls' night out." In this setting the hint of a lesbian relationship between two girls is waved away simply as "time to get a husband." Similarly, Antin wields her influence in an Edenic fantasy scene where Zevi is as alluringly unclothed as Rukhele.

Antin's "collaboration" with the mythic Antinov will continue as more of his long lost films "surface;" she plans an early "talkie" as their next project. Antin's work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney, the Hirschhorn, and the Venice Biennale. She has created a mixed-media piece, "Vilna Nights," for the reopening of New York's Jewish Museum. The installation, on display through December, consists of a life-size bombed out Ghetto street, through which one glimpses bits of the lives within.

from "The Man Without a World"

FROM *FRUM* TO FORBIDDEN

A Profile of Author Dani Shapiro *by Yona Zeldis McDonough*

Dani Shapiro sits in the living room of her apartment in New York's Upper West Side landmark, the Hotel des Artistes. She is a composed, gracious hostess, offering cold drinks and nibbling delicately on a butter cookie.

With her cool, blond beauty, dazzling blue eyes, and understated, up-to-the-minute clothing, she hardly looks like the granddaughter of one of the founders of New York's Lincoln Square Synagogue, as well as of a string of yeshivas in Israel. Yet that's precisely who she is, and in her novels, *Playing with Fire* (Doubleday, 1990) and *Fugitive Blue* (Doubleday, 1993), there is a persistent ache for the sense of meaning that religious observances provide, even as her protagonists move steadily toward the secular world.

Shapiro, 30, was raised in Hillside, New Jersey, in an Orthodox home. Though her parents are American born, she remembers how her father's colleagues at the New York Stock Exchange thought he was an old-world rabbi because he observed the Sabbath. She attended a Jewish day school until the sixth grade, after which she transferred to a local prep school. The switch was something of a shock: "There were very few Jews in that school and even fewer girls, so I was an oddball in two ways. And because I didn't 'look Jewish,' I found that I could cross over into the secular world. But it felt strange."

Shapiro says she stopped keeping kosher in high school. There was an element of adolescent rebellion about her decision, but also something more: "I sensed my father's ambivalence about the role of women in the Orthodox tradition," she says. "He was very proud of his daughters and wanted a lot for them; that didn't always coincide with expectations for women within the Orthodox community." Shapiro notes that she and her half-sister (from her father's previous marriage), a psychologist, are the two most professionally accomplished women in the extended family. Her mother, though from an observant background, was less insistent on raising her daughter in the Orthodox tradition; she essentially went along with her husband's wishes. So Shapiro's defection from the rules which governed her childhood engendered no serious opposition from either parent.

While she had "always written," it wasn't until her senior year at Sarah Lawrence that she began to think seriously about becoming a professional writer. During her last semester, an English professor submitted one of her short stories to the Henfield Fiction Competition, where it received second prize. "That made me sit up and take notice," recalls Shapiro. She enrolled in the M.F.A. program at Sarah Lawrence, and what began as her senior thesis became her first novel, which she sold to Doubleday while still a student.

That novel, *Playing with Fire*, centers on forbidden, obsessive relationships. While Shapiro says she doesn't start out with the intention of writing about taboos, they clearly hold a special appeal for her. In *Fugitive Blue*, protagonist Joanna is hopelessly in love with Billy Overmeyer, a gay man who, in the course of the book, becomes her stepbrother. "I find writing about what might happen more interesting than writing about what did," she explains. "My books are filled with a sense of longing rather than love; longing is the more powerful emotion."

Overlapping Realities

There is an ambulance in the distance, and for the first time in my life I understand why the sound of the siren is described as a wail. It is steady, a sound the human ear cannot bear as it moves closer.

I begin to whisper, and my voice seems to be louder than the approaching siren. I bend my head and murmur steadily into Billy's ear, as if my words will somehow keep him conscious, keep him afloat until the real work begins.

I say anything that comes to mind.

"Are you with me?" I ask him.

He moans. His eyes are turning to glass.

"Everything's going to be all right," I whisper, shutting my eyes tightly as I say it, pained by my own lack of authenticity or vision. These are television words, Marcus Welby words. "Everything's going to be all right," I drone again and again.

Billy looks at me then, and I see his eyes go in and out of focus.

"No, Josie."

When he opens his mouth, blood spurts out, a solid mass, covering both our faces.

from *Fugitive Blue*

Dani Shapiro

While she has not yet written a book explicitly about being Jewish ("I know I will someday," she says), her background and upbringing permeate her work. In *Playing with Fire*, the protagonist's grandfather is a famous biblical scholar, and Jewish rituals and observances are skillfully woven into the story. In *Fugitive Blue*, we slowly and painfully learn that Georgia, Joanna's mother, is a survivor of a Lithuanian pogrom whose emotional aftereffects prevent her from becoming close with her daughter.

Shapiro's present-day relationship to her Judaism is complex. While she is no longer observant, the issue of faith clearly continues to compel her. "In a way that I can't explain, I feel my creativity comes out of my being Jewish, even the conflicts I feel about it," she reflects. While she no longer practices, there are moments when Shapiro longs for the kind of order that an observant life provides. "I find I want my life to have a shape; I miss the structure." Yet, paradoxically, she finds greater spirituality in her life as it is now. "I was raised with the image of a punishing, judgmental God; I had a very religious upbringing but not always a spiritual one. I think my life now has a greater spiritual component; now I am more able to find God in nature and in other people."

Yona Zeldis McDonough is a novelist and short story writer. Sara Nuss-Galles is a writer living in Madison, NJ. Nora L. Mandel is LILITH's Development Counsel in New York City.

TSENA RENA

WHERE TO GO FOR WHAT IF YOU'RE JEWISH AND FEMAL

CONNECTIONS

Conference to celebrate the past and future of Jewish feminism sponsored by the Jewish Women's Resource Center will be held at Temple Emanu-El (5th Ave at 65th St) in NYC on Sunday, December 5, 1993. The conference, titled, "From Generation to Geneation—a Celebration of Jewish Feminism," will feature, among others, Judith Plaskow, Blu Greenberg and Esther M. Broner. *Contact Emily E. Milner, Jewish Women's Resource Center, 9 East 69th Street, New York, NY 10021. (212) 535-5900.*

Playwrights: help form a "Minyan of Women." Theatre Ariel, Philadelphia's regional theater dedicated to exploring the Jewish experience, invites script submissions for its second 10-minute play festival, which this year will celebrate the lives and contributions of Jewish women from Biblical times to the 1990's. Plays selected will be mounted for a February 1994 run and LILITH Magazine will publish an excerpt from one of the winning submissions. Plays must *not* exceed 10 minutes (8-9 pages doublespaced), *not* have been previously produced or be taken from a longer work, *not* have more than three characters, and must have minimal set and prop requirements. Deadline, October 15. *Deborah Baer Mozes, Theater Ariel, P.O. Box 0334 Merion Station, PA 19066. (215)735-9481.*

Have you written a critical/theoretical/ autobiographical essay focusing on the relation of your race, ethnicity, religion, gender, family, community, ability, or profession to specific texts or theoretical issues in your discipline? *Nexus: Writing on Location* will be an interdisciplinary anthology. Send your essay (15-25 pages) in duplicate. or query *Olivia Frey, English St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN 55057.*

The Do(o)little Report: "Why can't a man be more like a woman?" is a newsletter designed to help women cope with—or laugh at—the men in their lives. (The subtitle refers to the *My Fair Lady*-song about Eliza Doolittle.) Book reviews report on new titles addressing relationships, gender differences and communication. Send in real-life anecdotes addressing parenting, housework and other topics of daily coexistence. $12.95 for six bimonthly issues. *The Do(o)little Report, P.O. Box 1121, Fairport, NY 14450.*

The Campus Review, a multi-ideology and non-partisan newsletter comes from the University Student Department of the American Zionist Youth Foundation. Staffers work with student representatives on over 200 college campuses to educate the campus community about Israel and Zionism, and the Review includes interviews, a summary of campus activities nationwide and information on summer programs. College students are invited to submit articles, edtiorials or photos. Free sample. *USD/AZYF, 110 E. 59th Street, 3rd Fl. New York, NY 10022.*

An anthology on women's personal bereavement experiences, addressing the loss of loved ones, the loss of oneself to disabling and or terminal illlness and the collective loss of patients and clients by health professionals. Send writing and photoraphs reflecting the real-life spectrum of emotions, specific facets of bereavement, hardships of the caregiver, spiritual transformations and grief, financial hardship of death and dying, the inadequacy of our language in dealing with death, permission to die, funerals and other ceremonies, cultural diversity and differences concerning bereavement, clergy members and grief, public grieving, the rights of the dying. Pay to contributors is two copies of published book. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to a women's health organization to be determined interactively with the contributors. Submit by November 15; brevity appreciated; maximum 15 pages; audiocassette okay, multiple and simultaneous submissions encouraged. Include a cover letter about yourself with address and phone number, SASE. *Laurie Jones Neighbors, P.O. Box 2021 Monterey, CA 93942-2021.*

LIFECYCLE

Jewish Family is an independent newsletter edited by Harlene Appelman, featuring tips on holiday celebrations, parenting, grandparenting, health and mental health, travel, reviews of family resources, books, toys games, records, tapes. Six bimonthly issues $18.00. *Jewish Family, Alef Design Group, 4423 Fruitland Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90058.* Alef Design Group also offers a newsletter, *T'shuvah: Carrying the Message of Recovery,* a resource for Jews in 12-step recovery.

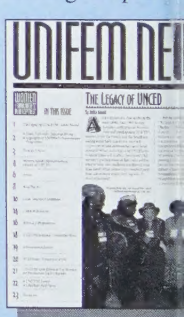
A Silent Sorrow: Pregnancy Loss, Guidance and Support for You and Your Family, by Ingrid Kohn, MSW, and Perry-Lynn Moffitt, founders of the Pregnancy Loss Support Program of the National Council of Jewish Women, New York Section. The book aims to help readers integrate their grief into their lives and move into the future with hope. It includes rituals for mourning unborn and newborn babies who die. *Delacorte Press, 1993, in your bookstore.*

New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams explores the passage from girl to woman, and builds healthy resistance to gender inequities. Readers are invited to send in letters, poems, drawings, stories, jokes, ideas, news, reviews, and dreams, as well as contributions to "How Aggravating! Inequities Girls Experience." Subscriptions $25.00 annually for 6 issues. Add $10.00 outside the USA. Sample copy, $5.00. *New Moon Magazine, 424 Lakeview Avenue, Duluth, MN, 55812, (218)728-5507.*

ENTERPRISE

Maan, a chamber of commerce and industry for Israeli women entrepreneurs to empower themselves through economic leverage. Members of the non-profit organization receive a broad range of services including referral to expert consultants, assistance in procuring loans, professional conferences and courses, a monthly newsletter, business club privileges and a brokerage service to match up businesses with potential investors. Membership is about $100 a year. *Maan, Rechov Patai 9A, Ramat Avi Tel Aviv, ISRAEL 03-6416727.*

Publishing Feminist Scholarship, a conference for editors, editorial board members and others, to consider philosophical, practical and political concern associated with editing and publishing feminst journals, will be held on October 30 at University of New Hampshire. $25. Fee will cover lunch and coffee breaks, overnight accomodations available. [This is a Saturday program, listed with ambivalence out of sensitivity to Shabbat observers.] *Patrocinio Schweickart, Editor, NWSA Journal, English Dept., University of New Hampshire, Durham NH 03824. (603)862-3967, FAX (603)862-4217.*



UNIFEM News, published qua terly by the United Nations Development Fund for Women's

dvocacy Program, reports on ecific regional and national pro- ts such as do-it-herself local omen's technological innova- ns, the invisible work force of omen miners, and the impact of de policy on women. It pro- otes the inclusion of women in e decision-making processes of ainstream development pro- ams and explores issues such as olence against women, legal lit- acy and women's lack of access financial services for enterprise. *NIFEM News, 303 East 45th reet, 6th Fl., New York, NY 017. (212)906-6705.*

omen's Information irectory lists over 10,000 ganizations, programs and ser- ces ranging from women's idies programs and shelters for ttered women to national orga- zations, books, videos and mag- ines, $75.00. *Gale Research, 5 Penobscot Bldg., Detroit , MI 226, (800)877-8253.*

THE PLANET

oice of the Trees is the wspaper of Shomrei Adamah, eepers of the Earth) a nonprofit ganization whose mission is to spire environmental awareness d practice among Jews through ntemporary interpretations of wish ecological ethics. bscriptions (three issues a year) e a benefit of membership, hich is open to individuals and ganizations. Contributions are deductible. *Shomrei Adamah, urch Road and Greenwood enue, Wyncote, PA 19095.*

VOICE OF THE TREES
קול האילנות
Welcome to the Winter Issue
In the Market
Copycat: Stewardship and the Lessons of Wildness

ofeminist Visions nerging, (EVE) is a center for omen who believe there is a funda- ental connection between the dev- ation of the earth and violence ainst women. Activities include dy groups, meetings on the new on of each month, and a Madison enue Graffiti Squad. Free sample monthly newsletter. *EVE, 402 West 46th Street, #3W, New York, NY 10036. (212)315-3107.*

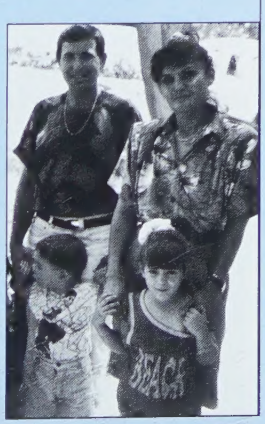
TZEDAKA

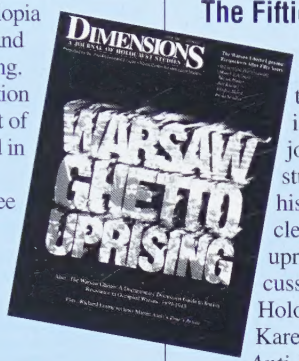
The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry raises funds to help educate Ethiopian children in Israel, reunite Jews still lost in Ethiopia with their families, and to provide job training. For a $100 contribution you can receive a set of baskets hand-crafted in Addis Ababa. You can also receive a free reading list on Ethiopian Jewry. *NACOEJ, 165 East 56h Street, New York, NY 10022, (212)752-6340.*

Keren Nissim Toledano is a tax-exempt charitable fund to support the family of Israeli border policeman Sgt. Major Nissim Toledano who was kidnapped and brutally murdered by Arab terrorists on December 13, 1992. The fund was established by his aunt, *Simone Toledano Gansburg, 647 Montgomery Street, Brooklyn, NY 11225, (718)773-2940.*

HOLOCAUST PROJECTS

Artist Judy Chicago's Holocaust Project reflects this darkest period of modern history—and how it grew out of concepts of power and dominance still with us today—in a series of works in tapestry, stained glass and tableaus combining painting with photography. The exhibition premieres October 18, 1993, at the Spertus Museum in Chicago, with Viking Penguin Books simultaneously issuing an illustrated book on the work. For more information on the exhibition and other projects of the not-for-profit organization formed to find permanent housing for Judy Chicago's monumental tribute to women's history, The Dinner Party, and for her Birth Project, or to buy art items for sale, attend workshops, or learn about internships, contact *Through the Flower, P.O. Box 8138, Santa Fe, NM 87504.*





The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is the theme of a special issue of *Dimensions*, a journal of Holocaust studies which includes historic essays and articles by survivors of the uprising as well as a discussion guide by Holocaust scholar Dr. Karen Shawn. $6.00 from *Anti-Defamation League, Box MRC,823 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017.*

PLACES

Kosher travelers can make themselves at home and make their own meals in centrally located short-term rental apartments with kitchen facilities (that may be kashered), and also receive lists of Jewish sights of interest in London, Paris and other European locations from *Barclay International Group, 150 East 52nd St., New York, NY 10022. 1(800)845-6636.*

The Lower East Side of Manhattan is a detailed street map/brochure spotlighting Jewish sights and history around Orchard and Delancey Streets with highlights of Little Italy, Chinatown, Hispanic Loisaida, and the East Village. Free with SASE from *Lower East Side Consortium, 110 William Street, 3rd Fl. New York, NY 10028.*

READ

IRIS: A Journal About Women is a twice yearly publication of the Women's Center of the University of Virginia, with wide ranging articles for the thoughtful, intelligent feminist (that's everyone, right?). $16.00 for two years. *IRIS, Women's Center, Box 323, HSC, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22908. (804)-982-2361.*

Conversion to Judaism: A Teaching Guide by Dr. Lawrence J. Epstein, provides an overview of conversion, discusses the controversy today among the streams of Judaism with guidelines on conversion for each, and includes of a list of famous converts to Judaism and a bibliography. $2.50 plus $3.00 shipping *CAJE Publications, 261 W. 35th St. 12th FL, New York, NY 10001.*

-compiled by Naomi Danis

ISSUES ON THE

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Lunch with the Girls

(L -R) Ann Orling Silverman, Esther Wexler Hoffer, the author, and Terry Wexler Hershkowitz.

by LESLIE HOLLIS MARGULIES

My mother called me up on Saturday and said, "come over, Ann and Alex are here." I knew she was was expecting her younger sister Terry. "You mean Terry and Leo, Mom." "No, it's Ann and Alex." "Are Terry and Leo there too?" Long pause. "No, I don't think so, wait a minute I'll get someone." "Someone," turned out to be Ann, my mother's best friend for sixty years. Ann explained that indeed Terry and Leo were there and they all came in one car. So it seemed my mother was half right.

Half right is pretty good these days. My mother has Alzheimer's and our conversations often have a bizarre nonsensical quality, guessing games really. She starts a sentence, I finish it. She loses something, we make a game of finding it. For a person who has always hated games I'm getting pretty good at this. It's not that I'm getting used to it. But maybe I actually am.

In some ways it's so much easier to "hang" (as my daughters say) with my mother. She's so much more open. One interesting facet of Alzheimer's is that a person's old defenses seem to vanish. Hence, my mother laughs louder, hugs harder and cries more easily. This is not the mother I grew up with, but a much freer uninhibited version.

I wonder if that adage, "Watch out what you wish for, or you might get it" has somehow come true? It hasn't really. I wished for a mother less frustrated and angry. I wished for a mother more open to me, less worried about pleasing my father. I wished for a mother who would hug me as often as I wanted, and now I have that. How very strange. It's hard to get angry at my mother these days. But I am so very very angry.

The younger of my two children has just left for college. I am proud of my children but I am officially empty-nested. I recently discovered that my favorite tree, a stately eighty year old Copper Beech tree in my front yard is dying. I turn forty-five in a few months. Oh yes, and I'm losing my mother in pieces.

But I was reminded of something very important the afternoon my mother's sister and her friend came to visit. With all these feelings of loss coming from so many directions I can still rediscover new things about my family. Good things. Funny things.

I had forgotten how funny these women were. They spent the afternoon with my mother reminiscing about their teenage years, and about the months they lived down south before their husbands went overseas in World War II. The men present listened quietly as did I. This was not my history but theirs.

Terry talked about life in a small town in Tennessee where Leo was stationed for a time. It seemed her fellow workers couldn't place the name Terry Hershkowitz. They tried and tried to get her to tell her religion and when the pressure became too great my Aunt Terry spoke up. My people are called Galiciana. For a time it seemed that worked. Those small town folk thought it was some exotic religion. We howled. My mother laughed the loudest.

Ann told about working in a government psychiatric hospital during the war. She related that as a secretary she took shorthand for a psychiatrist. On each patient's medical record she was instructed to write "Jew" where appropriate and "nigger" where appropriate. Ann went on to say that she eventually got even (at least in some small way) with her boss. When some German POW's were being treated at that same hospital she asked in her most concerned and respectful way whether or not she should write "Nazi" on the medical forms of the German patients. Her boss got the message. He turned, according to Ann, a pleasing shade of crimson.

They also reminded my mother that when she was a young girl looking for work she didn't always call herself Esther Wexler (too Jewish sounding). Instead she took her brother Gilbert's name and her twin sister Dorothy's name. So my mother Esther looked for work as Dorothy Gilbert. Again, everyone laughed, especially my mother. Distant history is much more familiar than today's date or whose voice is on the phone. At some point Ann said, "it's hard growing up." Terry responded with "it's hard growing old."

I often look for humor at the most painful of times. Maybe I learned that from these people. As a child I needed the company of adults. I always stayed close. I loved the reportage, the lively way they interpreted the world. I loved the laughing, the inside jokes, the energy.

When Ann and Terry were leaving, my mother asked how they were getting home. Ann said, "I'm going in Terry's car, I'm no flat-leaver." This I was told was an old junior high expression which my mother remembered well. *Flat-leaver-* to leave someone flat.

I came away from that visit with such a wonderful feeling of belonging. I'm losing my mother in pieces and sometimes the pain seems more than I can bear. As much as I'd like to hide, to run away, I can't. I'm no flat-leaver. But please, does anybody know a good joke or story? I'm saving them up. I'll need them down the road.

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